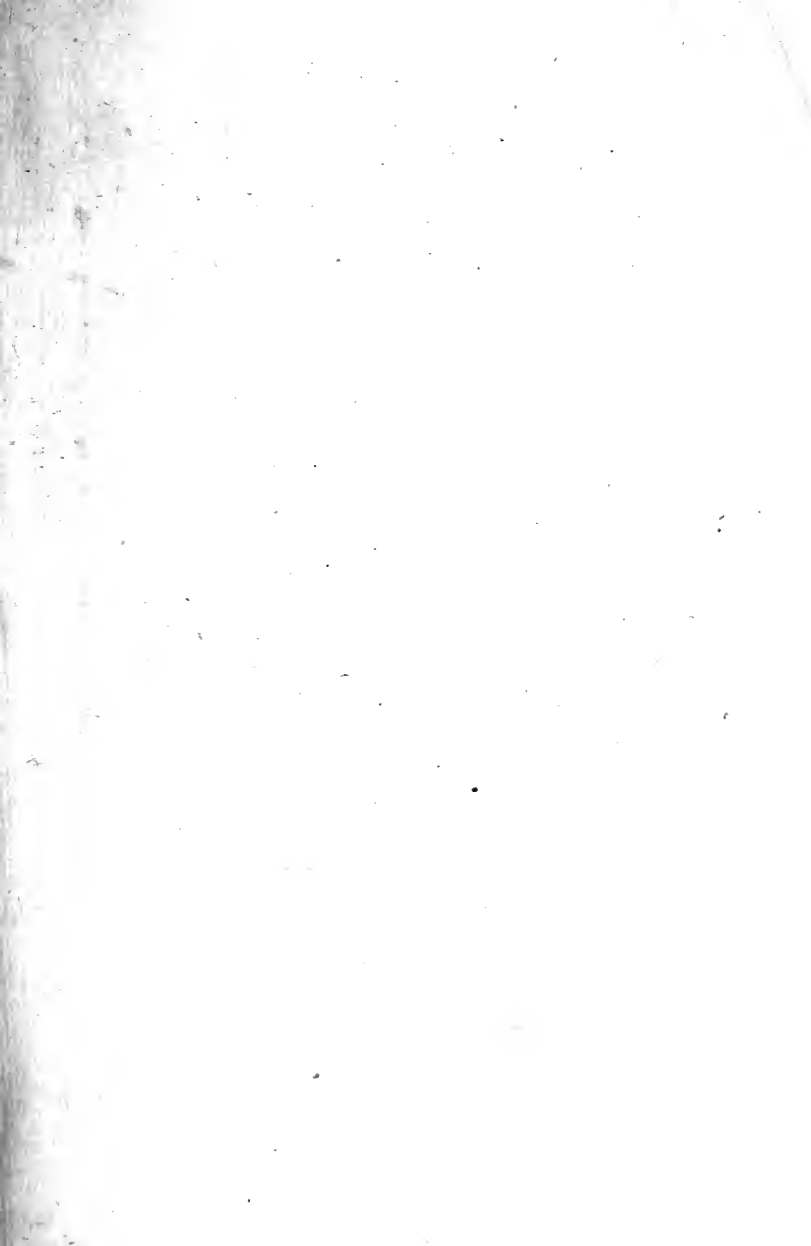
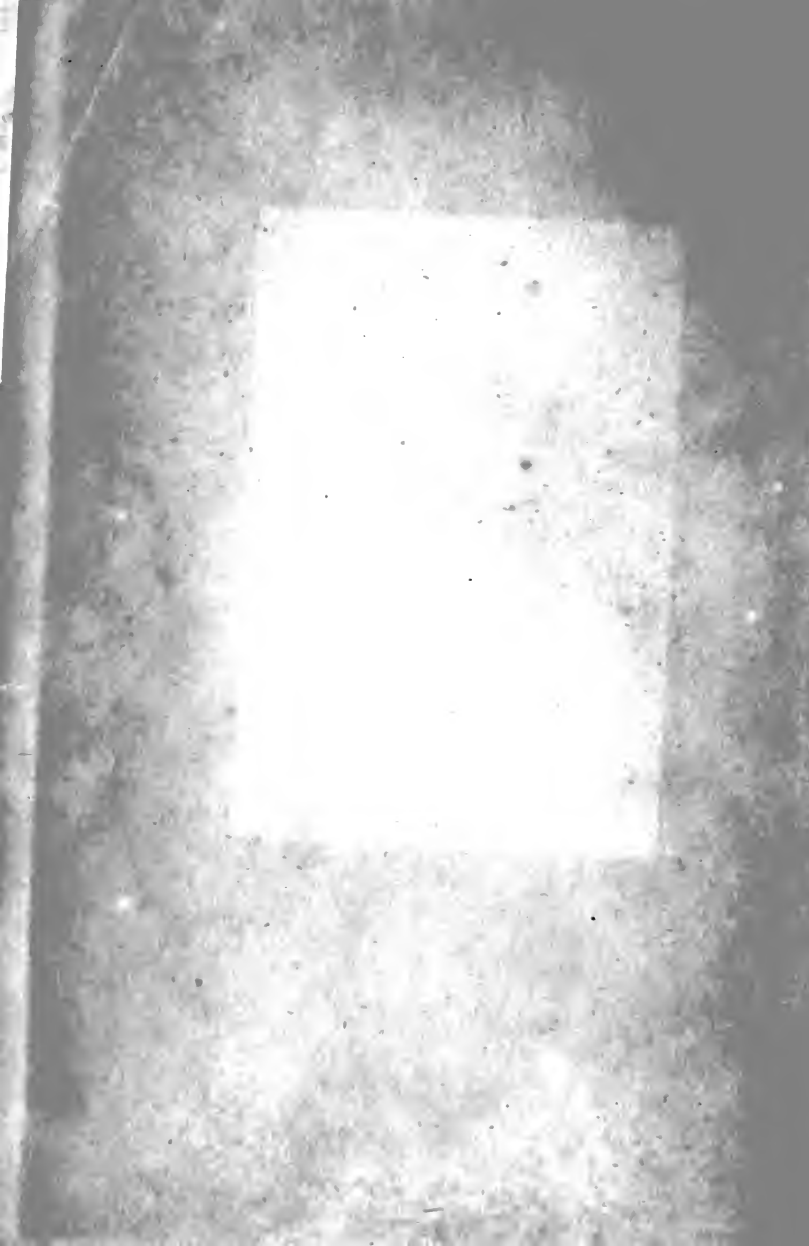




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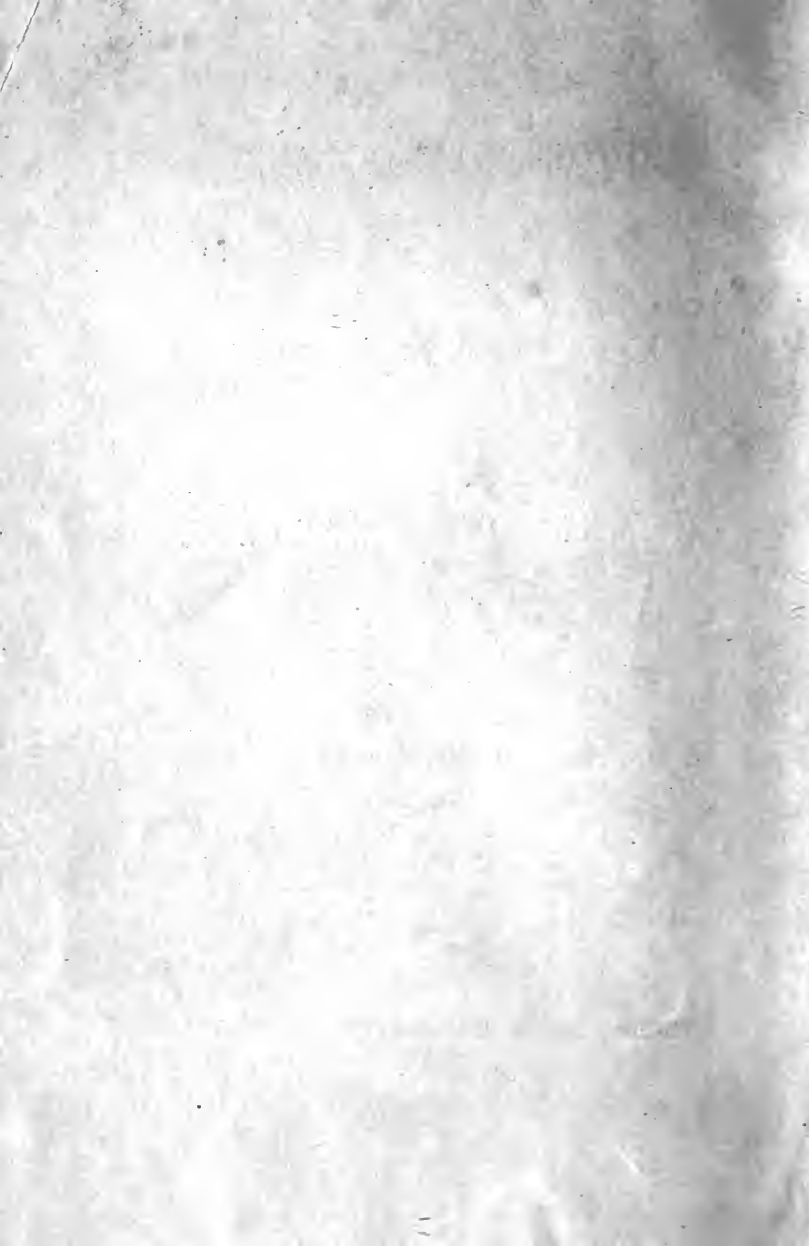
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GWENDOLINE'S HARVEST.

VOL. II.



GWENDOLINE'S HARVEST.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,' 'A PERFECT
TREASURE,' 'FOUND DEAD,' &c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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GWENDOLINE'S HARVEST.

CHAPTER I.

GOLDEN OPINIONS.

IN a few weeks, Bedivere Court and Glen Druid were both occupied only by servants on board-wages. Sir Guy and Gwendoline, and Mr Ferrier and his children, were all in town. The baronet and his daughter took quiet lodgings in St James's Place, but communicated with none of their fashionable friends. The bridegroom elect knew scarcely any one in London, and of course passed most of his time with the Trehernes. When Marion

and little 'Eady' (which was the general love-term for Edith) accompanied him, they did not find themselves at all *de trop*, as usual in such cases; and indeed Gwendoline gave them a very genuine welcome. Their presence was an immense relief to her, though Mr Ferrier naturally enough did not take that view of the matter, but admired her more than ever for her devotion to his little ones. He even spoke of it with enthusiasm to Sir Guy over their claret, and thereby afforded that acute gentleman an opportunity, as he thought, of diplomatically introducing a certain delicate subject.

'Yes, my dear Ferrier,' said he, 'it is evident enough that Gwendoline adores your motherless little ones; and, indeed, although she has generally great command over her feelings—as the Trehernes have always had—she can never speak of them to me without emotion. Do I conjecture right in supposing that you will appoint

her—who will certainly be their natural protector—their legal guardian ?’

Mr Ferrier’s cheek flushed up a little : he was never quite at his ease with the baronet, and shrunk from giving him the least offence. Moreover, the suggestion just made to him had, it was probable, been proposed to her father by Gwendoline herself, which rendered a refusal still more embarrassing. But for all his affection for his bride elect, which was excessive, and of that devotional sort which is scarcely seen save where there is great disparity of age, Mr Ferrier did not hesitate in what he felt to be the path of duty. He was liberal, and even lavish, notwithstanding Mr Samuel Barland’s remark on folks from the far north ; but he always remembered to be just before he was generous.

‘No, Sir Guy,’ said he firmly ; ‘I can at present make no prospective arrangement to that extent. The disposition of my little ones must, like that of the bulk of

my property, depend upon the future.' Then for the first time he unfolded to his father-in-law elect his pecuniary intentions with respect to Gwendoline. It was a matter on which the baronet had wisely abstained from questioning him. Mr Ferrier was a man much easier led than driven, and would have resented any dictation upon such a subject. Business matters were his strong point; and, on the other hand, he did not need to be told his duty. His intentions on the present occasion were what suited both with his natural liberality and his sense of right, though they by no means came up with Sir Guy's expectations. Mr Ferrier had arranged to supply Gwendoline with a handsome allowance for pin-money, and to settle on her a good jointure; but he had no idea of materially injuring the prospects of his children. Moreover, he might have issue by Gwendoline herself, and their interests would have to be consulted.

The baronet could not altogether conceal his chagrin at this news; and if he had spoken the genuine feelings of his heart, he would have said something of this sort : ‘ It is not to be supposed that an ancient and third-rate personage like you, sir, can purchase so superior a being as my daughter for the same price, or anything like it, as a more eligible suitor. The least you could have done, in my opinion, would have been to settle half your property upon her; the other half would, even then, have been more than sufficient for your girls, and probably only made them the objects of designing fortune-hunters. Out of that you might, therefore, reasonably have given me (Sir Guy) a good lump sum, not in mere acknowledgment of my rank (for that, since we are to be so nearly connected, I waive), but in compensation to me for what I have expended on this young woman’s education and attire, and various extras. I

really do not see the good of the existence of people of your third-rate class at all, if we are not to make something out of you; and if I had only guessed what a faint sense you entertain of the honour done to you in this alliance with my family, by gad, sir, I would have taken my pig to another market.'

What Sir Guy did say was something very different. He remonstrated, it is true: he even took the serious and sepulchral line of his being an old man, and of the necessity incumbent on him of 'looking beyond himself;' but either because he was out of his element on such topics, and argued it ill, or because, since the bridegroom elect was as old as he was, the argument was ill appreciated, Sir Guy failed to move the other from his position; and finding no better terms could be made, he dismissed the whole matter with a good-humoured pleasantry.

In a very different tone did he com-

municate the news that evening to his daughter, when their guest had left. He did not spare his future son-in-law, even in the way of epithet: 'The man is a mere skinflint, Gwendoline; and, for my part, I am quite prepared to throw him over, even at this eleventh hour. You have only to write a line to Lady Beaumonde, to say we're in town, and next week you may take your choice among the best in England. Depend upon it, my dear, we have made a mistake here altogether.'

'I think not, papa,' was Gwendoline's quiet rejoinder; 'at least, *I* have made no mistake.' And a look accompanied the reply, which said as plainly as any spoken words: 'You know it was arranged that I was to shift for myself.'

Sir Guy seemed much cast down: abashed, it was not in the nature of things he should be.

'If you have nothing to do with your-

self, papa,' she went on, 'or if I have put you to expenses that cripple you for the present, why should you not accompany us abroad?'

'What! On your marriage? On Monday week, Gwendoline? Surely that would be impossible.'

'Would it?' said she coldly. 'Well, at all events, join us as soon as it *will* be possible. I will take care that Mr Ferrier asks you to do so; and one of us at least will be glad to see you.'

Gwendoline was speaking truth there, and her father kissed her with trembling playfulness for her gracious words. He did not guess that almost anybody else would have been as eagerly welcomed to make a third in that coming honeymoon as himself.

'Yes,' said he, 'I will certainly make one of your party, notwithstanding that I understand those brats are to accompany

you; and you know how children annoy me.'

'Marion, however, is a very well-behaved little girl, papa, and nobody will ask you to carry the baby. Paris—Florence—Rome; that is the programme, it seems; and we are to return to Glen Druid in the early autumn.'

She traced out the route as coolly as though she had been reading an extract from *Bradshaw*; and we may state, without accompanying the happy pair upon their travels, as Sir Guy did, that it was adhered to.

Mr Ferrier was not 'thrown over' at the eleventh hour, but married Gwendoline Treherne on the day appointed. Never had so quiet a wedding taken place before at St George's, Hanover Square. The fashionable world were astonished the next morning over their chocolate to read the news of such a ceremony having been per-

formed in their absence, and rather resented it. 'But when a girl marries for money,' they charitably reflected, 'it is the bridegroom's wishes that have to be consulted until after he is secured.' They had no idea it was Gwendoline herself who had insisted upon the 'quietness' of the affair. That there were no bridesmaids, no breakfast, no anything, was all set down to the miserly eccentricity of the unknown Scotch gentleman of eighty or so (some said ninety), who had purchased the belle of the last season. There was one thing in which it was sarcastically observed that he was very generous; the fashion of 'no cards' had not as yet commenced; but the number of cards which the Ferriers sent out quite excited remark, it was so prodigious. No acquaintance of the Trehernes—and their circle of acquaintance was very large—seemed to have been omitted. But this, too, in reality, was as little to be laid to the bridegroom's charge

as the rest of the arrangements. The bride was solely responsible for it. In doing so, she was sowing the seed of what she intended should be a vast harvest of popularity; she was casting bread upon the waters, of which she hoped to see the fruits after many days.

In most dramas, when the heroine marries, the curtain falls with ‘They lived happy ever afterwards’ inscribed upon it, or at least suggested by the last ‘tag:’ but the story of Gwendoline Treherne can admit of no such conclusion. She is married, it is true; but her life henceforth is no more to be predicated from that circumstance than the future of a man who takes the name and arms of another by the Queen’s license, for certain considerations, is to be thereby foretold. With most women, marriage is the scheme of their existence, the capital of the column of life. With Gwendoline Treherne, it was but the first step of the pedestal.

Early in autumn, and after about six months of continental travel, Mr and Mrs Ferrier and the children returned to Glen Druid. It is sarcastically said that country folks have little to talk about except politics and one another; but so far they are little behind the town. The misfortune is that they take their politics from tradition, or yesterday's newspaper (which is much the same), while they themselves are few in number, and—since it is only poets and fox-hunters (of whom the latter class is much more numerous than the former) who *can* live in the country—mostly of one type. The return of the Ferriers was an incident by the side of which all ordinary excitements of the neighbourhood—confirmations, family bazaars, and comings of age of the sons of the magistracy—paled their ineffectual fires. The curiosity of the county to see Gwendoline, and pass judgment on her behaviour as wife and step-mother, was

extreme; and she did not balk them. The newly-married couple went out everywhere; and when that duty had been thoroughly performed, they received everybody at home. Nothing could exceed Mrs Ferrier's urbanity and good-humour. Society could not reproach itself enough for having once thought her unconciliatory or reserved. How true it was that one should never pass hasty verdicts upon persons whom one has had no opportunity of knowing thoroughly! What was more satisfactory than all, was to see how sweet little Marion clung to her. It was not always that a young woman of beauty and fashion showed herself in so amiable a light with respect to the whims and ways of children; and it was rarer still to see a second wife so entirely devoted to the offspring of her predecessor. Conversation of this sort took place for the most part among the ladies, and was generally followed by certain significant smiles and

whispers, the nature of which we are far too polite to reveal. Indeed, they chiefly consisted of oracular and mystic sentences, not easy to be deciphered by masculine minds at all ; such as, ' Nothing of the sort at present ; ' ' Quite a mistake, I assure you ; ' and (this from a high domestic authority, who had just been made a grandmother), ' Pooh, pooh ; not likely. '

From reproaching itself with its old verdict upon Gwendoline, Society went on to reverse it. For what beside her cold and haughty manner—which it was now evident had been but the natural result of high birth joined to very slender means—had ever been really urged against her ? Absolutely nothing, except some vulgar story about the sudden and harsh dismissal of her waiting-maid from Glen Druid. The girl was a great talker, had made some bitter complaints, and even invented some scandals, against her mistress before she went away ; but if one is to

listen to the tattle of discharged domestics, what mistress's character would be safe? And, talking of servants, could anything be more admirable than Mrs Ferrier's conduct—it was but a small thing, but it was very significant of her magnanimity of character—with respect to Susan Ramsay that was, who had been turned away from Glen Druid for her impertinence to her, when Miss Treherne? One of Mrs Ferrier's first acts upon her return home was to send little Marion down to St Medards to see her old nurse; which not only showed a forgiving spirit, but proved how genuine had been her own affectionate treatment of the child. For of course the artless infant would pour into Susan's greedy ears all her woes and wrongs, if she had had any, and give quite an unvarnished account of her new mamma. Yet even Susan Barland—who was very well known among the families in the neighbourhood, for she was an excellent

dressmaker, and eked out her husband's income by that calling—had confessed that little Marion was very fond of her step-mother, and had nothing whatever to say against her. It was surely a great feather in Gwendoline's cap that she nourished no 'bitterness,' which so often exists in people that ought to be far above it. Then, again, to see her with the baby—little Eady—it was the most charming sight in the world: the clergyman at St Medards had said it was 'an education in itself;' never had such a step-mother been seen before—at all events in West Cornwall. If Gwendoline had been dead and buried—a calamity shocking to reflect upon, when one remembered those two motherless lambs—the gilded record of virtues upon her tombstone, which would doubtless have been as complete as the art of composition could make it, could scarcely have been excelled by the golden opinions that were now expressed of her.

As to her behaviour as a wife, it was perfect—it was beautiful. It was agreed upon all hands that never before had old man been so fortunate in the choice of a second spouse as Mr Ferrier. It was also remarked that he was looking very old.

CHAPTER II.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

It was not only the county that was bidden to the hospitalities of Glen Druid. Gay London folks, friends of Mrs Ferrier and her father, came gladly down to lounge on the broad terraces, and play croquet on the lawn or on the sands of the bay. At the end of his earthly pilgrimage, Mr Bruce Ferrier reaped the reward of a lifetime of assiduity, in having more than one live lord a guest beneath his roof. Lord Chillington, an old college friend of Sir Guy's, was so good as to promise a week of his valuable time to the honest mer-

chant, which was prolonged to a month by a sharp fit of the gout. He was a very polished and stately ornament to a drawing-room, and celebrated for his curious anecdotes of the days of the Regency—which he regretted with genuine pathos. His fishy eyes would twinkle almost like life when recalling those times when he and Sir Guy had so often heard the chimes at midnight—and would also have heard them had they rung at four in the morning. He had much more courtly manners than the baronet, but also distinctly showed the Tartar if you chanced to scratch his skin. Dr Gisborne and he had once an argument together upon a small question of matter of fact—the subject being the famous *Perdita*—wherein his lordship was proved decisively to be in the wrong; and he lost his temper to that extent that his scientific adversary had to bleed him; notwithstanding which good office, he went about for the short remainder of his life complaining

that he had been asked to sit at the same table, down in Cornwall, with a confounded apothecary. Lord Luttrell also honoured Glen Druid with his presence, accompanied by his brother, the Honourable Piers Mestyn, 'Both very old friends of mine and of your wife's, Ferrier, and whom I have known ever since they were *so* high,' was Sir Guy's introduction. Mr Camellair, the distinguished artist, and one or two more of his fraternity, were also of the company; he had come down expressly to paint Mrs Ferrier—the portrait was afterwards engraved for the *Book of Beauty*—but when his mission was done, he still staid on, enraptured with the effects of light and shadow on the Warrior's Helm. He was also partial to the Steinberg and green Curacoa, both of which were of better quality at Glen Druid than those in his own cellar at St John's Wood. These artists were to Gwendoline what aides-de-camp are to their chief in time of peace :

they took messages for her, anticipated her wishes for a water-ice, caught her laced handkerchief in the very act of falling (such was their nimble grace), and invented small-talk for her for the dinner-party in the evening. When they were so fortunate as to secure her private ear, and could resist the temptation of abusing one another, they paid her tender compliments. 'She was Snow, but had never fallen,' said the cleverest of them.

There were London ladies, too, guests at Glen Druid, who should by rights have been mentioned first; but the presence of Lord Chillington obtruded itself upon my mind, and monopolized its attention. There was a Lady Chillington somewhere in lodgings at Bath, but nobody knew anything about her beyond the card-circles of that faded city, where she lived in great repute, however, upon five hundred a year, which his lordship allowed her out of her own money; for she had at one time been

an heiress. There was also a Lady Luttrell, who accompanied her husband and brother-in-law; but she was proclaimed 'unsatisfactory' by most persons of her own condition. She was undeniably pretty, but she had no 'style.' It was understood that she was of a religious turn; which perhaps explained the cold discouraging look with which she received even the best of Lord Chillington's 'reminiscences,' when the rest of the company were all appreciation. Even if their tone *was* a little free, it would have shown a more Christian spirit in her, it was observed, to have been more complacent in her reception of them, considering that he was a peer of the realm, and of an age to demand respect. With this exception—which was, it must be allowed, however, a very grave one—she was civil to every one, down to the very servants; yet the company complained that 'somehow or other they could not get on' with Lady Luttrell.

She had 'nothing to say for herself,' and took everything people said to her *au grand sérieux*; and they wondered openly how Luttrell 'stood it.' That good-natured viscount removed his habitual cigar to laugh at this idea; assured them that his 'Kitty' was worth the whole lot of them, Chillington included; and expressed his belief that when the time came—and his constitution was already what he called 'shaky'—and supposing what the parsons said was true, he should get to heaven by her vicarious aid. 'She is so deuced good, bless you, she'll frank me right through, just like a post-letter.'

To do the viscount justice, it was not in view of this prospective advantage to himself that he allowed his wife to take her own way in life—to visit the poor, to tend the sick, and to teach in a Sunday school. He was not nearly so clever as his younger brother—he was even a downright fool to smoke ten cigars a day when

one gave him the heartburn—and he knew it; but he had sense enough to perceive what made his Kitty happy: perhaps his conscience pricked him that in one or two particulars he had done much to make her *unhappy*, and this was his atonement, that he let her take her own way. At all events she did so at Glen Druid; she rather avoided the half-dozen fashionable couples that made up the other guests of the Ferriers, and passed much of her time, by Gwendoline's permission, in the nursery with the children—of whom, though passionately fond, she had none of her own; her brother-in-law, Piers, was heir-presumptive to the title of Luttrell. She had rather taken to Miss Blackett, and had more than once driven into St Medards to join her upon certain charitable errands. But Dr Gisborne was not a favourite of her ladyship: the freedom of his freely expressed opinions had shocked her; while, on the other hand, the doctor had been heard to say

that Lady Luttrell was the only one of the 'London Lot'—as he somewhat contemptuously termed Mr Ferrier's metropolitan guests—that was worth her salt. He compared her (but much more tersely) in Miss Blackett's private ear, to a single flower growing among a wilderness of weeds upon a hotbed of inodorous material.

The 'London Lot' and the 'County Lot' (except the very cream of the latter) did not, to say truth, blend together very harmoniously: the former had the advantage of union and compactness, beside that of better understanding the (polite) art of war; they discussed together very unreservedly the characters of the less favoured guests who had just taken leave, and were being whirled away for miles over the windy moors before they got to their beds; their own position afterwards gave them almost that superiority over the others which those who are invited to dinner possess over those who are asked to 'come

in the evening.' Perhaps it was not altogether without reason that the families of the neighbourhood accused them of giving themselves airs. But, nevertheless, nobody dreamed of refusing an invitation to Glen Druid, where the hostess certainly did her very best—and, upon the whole, not unsuccessfully—to persuade the oil and vinegar to coalesce. Not a day was suffered to go by without an entertainment of some sort. There were dinner-parties, dancing-parties, and acted charades, in which last it was the universal regret that Gwendoline declined to appear. Mr Ferrier had not expressed any objection to her doing so, but with delicate tact she had anticipated his view of the matter, and pleased him by abstaining from taking part in them.

She had won Lady Luttrell's respect too by that prudent course, and the two sat close together one entire evening, talking more familiarly than usual about Marion and Eady, and how the fishermen's families

got on in stormy weather. The quiet beauty of the viscountess afforded an exquisite foil to the imperial charms of Mrs. Ferrier; and they were both much admired; but it was admitted on all hands that there were many Lady Luttrels in the world, and only one Gwendoline. The latter wore a ceaseless smile, although she endured ten minutes of agony while she watched Piers Mostyn, as Pyramus, make love in dumb-show (but with great naturalness) to one Miss Beauvoir, as Thisbe.

Beside these evening gaieties, there were often entertainments in the daytime—fêtes and garden-parties. On one of those occasions, Susan Barland, who was now dressmaker in ordinary to Marion and Eady, had been asked by the former, with Gwendoline's permission, to take tea in the nursery. It was the first time she had visited Glen Druid since her dismissal, almost two years ago; and how different, thought she, was the scene before her, as

she wound along the path that led to the back of the house, and gazed through the tall hedge of sea-tamarisk upon the terraced gardens, to that which she had left about the house of mourning. A band of music, hidden in the grotto, was playing some lively air, and the fountains were leaping in the sun, as if to the melody. Upon the lawn was a vast tent, canopied with silk, where scores of fine folks were merry-making and taking refreshment; while from the croquet-ground came little bursts of laughter between every tap of the balls. How utterly the memory of her late mistress seemed to have faded away! She saw Gwendoline attended by a little knot of obsequious cavaliers, and looking like a queen with her courtiers. Why should a sensation of dislike which almost amounted to horror have thrilled through Susan's frame as she regarded her? What had the present Mrs Ferrier ever done to her, to cause her to entertain such hostile feelings?

Had she not been forgiving?—nay, did not her own presence in the grounds of Glen Druid at that moment testify to Gwendoline's good-will towards her? Susan asked herself these questions, but something within her also furnished the reply. She did not believe in the genuineness of Mrs Ferrier's 'makings-up' with her, or in the kindness for which she was doubtless expected to credit her. She did not think her at all a woman likely to forgive an injury, and, least of all, such an offence as she had committed—namely, an attempt to prejudice her with those whose favour she sought. Others might be hoodwinked if they pleased to be so, but not she. Why, she felt as certain that yonder woman was a false schemer, as that she was the most beautiful creature that ever wore woman's shape. Her beauty might dazzle all mankind, and even womankind, but it did not dazzle her. She had heard of serpents that fascinated their victims before

destroying them; and although this one had not destroyed her former mistress, she had certainly fascinated her, and suffered her to perish without warning—perhaps both soul and body. And yet she had gained the end which doubtless she had in view from the moment she had set foot in that house as an unsuspected guest. All had gone well with her, and she was even in a position to be magnanimous and patronizing to an honest woman who had done her best to expose her schemes. It was this indifference to her own hostility and show of kindly patronage that stung Susan most. Her soul was exceedingly filled with the scorning of her that was at ease, and with the contempt of the proud. She had ventured, trusting to the weapon of Right, to cross swords with this accomplished fencer, and after being disgracefully disarmed, had been treated with galling generosity.

For sympathy in her defeat she looked

in vain. Even her husband thought her prejudiced and foolish in her antagonism to Mrs Ferrier, and had rather peremptorily forbidden it to be openly exhibited ; it was quarrelling, he said, with their own bread and butter. Susan was, however, no more inclined to do that than Mr Barland ; only, she was not grateful for her enemy's favours, but considered all she received from her as so much spoiling of the Philistines. She had no wish to declare open war ; she had had enough of that, but would wait patiently, silently, until she caught her foe at a disadvantage. Such an opportunity would offer itself one day, she felt sure, if she only waited long enough. In the mean time, she had a strong attraction to the house in the dear children, over whom she felt it her mission to watch. Even while making this reflection, Marion herself came riding by on a white pony, led by a groom, while Lady Luttrell held her lightly on the saddle, though she rode

with quiet courage, as was her wont, and would have been quite safe alone. She was a very self-reliant intelligent child, and not easily excited; but perceiving Susan through the slender hedge, she clapped her hands, and cried out: 'There is Susie. O Susie, do come and see my dear Ady Uttel.'

Thus adjured, Susan came forward, and paid her respects to her ladyship, and kissed the child.

'Tum alon,' cried Marion; 'oo go one side, and Ady Uttel the other. But no,' she said; 'poor Eady up-stairs, go and fetch *her*.'

'Yes, dear Marion, that is right,' said her ladyship approvingly; 'we must not forget baby-sister. I think, Susan, if you were to tell the nurse to bring her out—'

'No, no; Susie tum too,' interrupted the child.

'Very well, then,' said Lady Luttrell,

smiling, 'bring her out yourself: the music will delight her.'

'I thank your ladyship, but I should not like to go amongst the quality,' said Susan modestly; 'and perhaps Mrs Ferrier might object.'

'I will take the blame on my own shoulders, Susan, if there should be any blame, which, however, I am sure will not be the case. Mrs Ferrier asked you to-day on purpose that you might see the gaieties, I am sure; and besides, if you feel shy, you can avoid the company, and take Eady round the Warrior's Helm; the sea-air will do her good.'

Susan took the baby and Lady Luttrell's advice accordingly. She found the narrow path round the strange-shaped promontory quite deserted; everybody was in the garden or on the terrace. Only the music and the murmur of voices blended faintly on the ear with the lap of the waves upon the crags below, or with their soft sweep on

the sandy beach. Susan was not what is generally termed sentimental; but though she had never read a line of poetry in her life (unless her chapel hymns could be so called), and was over thirty years of age, and had always kept her maiden eyes on the main chance at least as much as on Samuel her swain, yet she was not uninfluenced by the romance of the situation. She did not forget that it was upon this very walk—to which he had been admitted by favour of the gardener—that Samuel had declared his love for her between the puffs of his pipe, in a quiet philosophic way, which pleased her perhaps quite as much as raptures would have done. It was years ago now, but the recollection of it was distinct enough, and only made the more mellow and harmonious by the intervening time. She had no regret to trouble her; her present was sufficiently satisfactory; but still she felt that indefinable sorrow for the past because it *is* past, from which none

of us are altogether free; and it was with something of tender melancholy that, with Eady clasped in her arms, she drew near to the identical spot—a sort of natural arbour in the rock—where Mr Samuel Barland had suddenly removed his pipe from his lips with unwonted alacrity, passed the back of his hand rapidly across his mouth, and kissed her for the first time.

The locality had, in her opinion, been ill judged, inasmuch as any one using the path must needs come suddenly upon a couple so engaged, and she had never, therefore, given Mr Barland the opportunity of so misconducting himself again in that particular spot; but it was all the more sacred to her, as having been the scene of that first embrace, and of it only. As she turned the corner with a step noiseless and slow, in consonance with these tender reminiscences, she suddenly discovered that Sam's idea—or rather something very like it—was being plagiarized. The tall

gentleman, with the small black moustache and olive complexion, was not absolutely saluting the tall lady, whose face she could not see, but they were without doubt what is termed 'laying their heads together' uncommonly close. Susan drew back unobserved, and not a little amused. Well, the Quality were only like other people, it seemed, after all. It would be something to tell Sam when she got home, and would make him laugh in his dry way. With all her thrift and matter-of-fact ways, Susan was a true woman, and, as such, deeply interested in all love affairs. Without disturbing or unfairly prying upon these two young people, she was determined to know who they were, and especially anxious to recognize the lady. She waited, therefore, with her little charge, on a seat that was placed on the narrow isthmus which joined the Warrior's Helm to the mainland, and by which all those who were on that promontory must needs

pass on their way back. Some time elapsed before her patience was rewarded, but at last the same tall lady made her appearance alone, and walking rather fast. To Susan's genuine horror, she perceived it was Gwendoline herself, who had thrown a brown mantle over her light dress she had seen her wearing but a few minutes before, and had thereby escaped her recognition.

'Ah, Susan, is that you with my darling Eady?' said Mrs Ferrier graciously. 'I am glad to see you at Glen Druid again. But I feel the wind somewhat chilly here, even through this warm cloak: I think you had better take baby in.'

It was evidently Gwendoline's intention to accompany her, and see her safely away before her late companion should come up, but his impatience frustrated this. Hardly had Susan begun to move, when the young gentleman she had just seen talking so confidentially to his

hostess, came striding after them, and humming a gay tune. Susan Barland could almost have sworn that she saw a significant glance of caution shoot from Mrs Ferrier's quiet features as he came up; and as if in answer to it the young man observed: 'I have been looking for you everywhere, Mrs Ferrier, having been deputed to enlist you for croquet.'

'Very good, Mr Mostyn,' she replied. 'I will just take one kiss of my sweet Eady, and shall then be at your service; though I am but an indifferent player, I do assure you.'

'An indifferent player!' thought Susan, with indignation filling her honest breast, as she lifted up the child for what she deemed that 'Judas' kiss: 'you are the craftiest player and play-actor that ever breathed. I have always suspected you to be a bad one, but I never thought you were so bad as this.'

At tea in the nursery, all that evening,

Susan could scarcely think of anything else than what she had just seen; and on her way home across the solitary moor it engrossed her wholly. She had now not the least intention of telling her husband of that interview to which she had been witness. She was not going to be misjudged a second time, or make any accusation without the proofs. But she was fully convinced in her own mind that ‘that ’ere Mrs Ferrier was one of the wickedest of women.’ Flirtations among single folks she could blink at; ‘young people will be young people, and one must expect such things;’ but for a married woman to so misbehave herself!

Mrs Barland, it is needless to say, was a very vulgar personage, and totally ignorant of the manners and customs of polite society; but in addition to this, and what really gave some genuine colour to her otherwise unnecessarily virtuous indignation — she had recognized at the

second glance, in the Honourable Piers Mostyn, that identical 'bonnie laddie' who had accompanied Miss Treherne, seven months ago, down Glendallack mine, as a common workman.

'Ah, my poor master, my poor old master!' exclaimed honest Susan; 'you have brought this upon your ain sel, for I would ha' warned you if you would ha' let me. But I do mourn for your innocent bairns.'

CHAPTER III.

DR GISBORNE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCES.

IF Susan Barland was tormented (as was doubtless the case) with the idea that Mrs Ferrier was not only triumphant but happy in the success of her schemes, she might have spared herself that pang. Gwendoline was consumed with disgust, with weariness, with impatience. The perpetual necessity for acting her part did not leave her one hour of ease. She was devoured too by the fire of jealousy. Quite superfluously, and solely because it flattered her self-love to be so, she had been very urgent upon Piers to conduct

himself as though his affections were entirely disengaged, and he had carried out her instructions to the letter. The flirtations to which she had been a witness rankled in her mind like poison; every glance, every smile of his, bestowed upon another, transfixed her like a dart; while those which she did not see, but imagined, drove her to frenzy. It was not words of tenderness alone that were exchanged between him and her in Mr Samuel Barland's bower on the Warrior's Helm, and elsewhere. Bitter reproaches, passionate appeals, were uttered on the one side; and upon the other, apologies, excuses, denials, all more or less unsatisfactory. She was more beautiful than ever, or perhaps she might have escaped from the toils in spite of herself. When she was with him, Piers was devoted to her; she was his empress, his pole-star, as she had ever been; but was there (she knew he was asking himself)

any reasonable probability of her ever becoming his wife ?

Yes, there was. At all events, the event was more probable than it had been. It was openly remarked that Mr Ferrier was growing feebler both in body and mind than his age would warrant, when his former activity was taken into account. Gwendoline's influence over him was unbounded ; he was dotingly fond of her, he was her slave ; but while he hugged the gilded chain, he secretly felt its weight. He was aware, and uncomfortably aware—although he did not own it even to himself—of his inability to cope with her strong will. From whatever causes, however, he was aging and ailing, and Mrs Ferrier came suddenly to the conclusion that Glen Druid was too gay ; that the eternal racket was too much (as it well might be, for even the most well-bred people make some noise) for her husband's

nerves, and that he needed quiet. The guests must all be sent away, and above all the Honourable Piers Mostyn.

The interview in which she stated this resolve was the stormiest that had yet passed between her lover and herself, though she did her best to exercise self-control. She knew that he was weary of her reproaches, and the idea of his getting tired of her plunged her in despair; yet how should she do otherwise than reproach him? What made her more bitter against him than even his flirtations, was the secret conviction she entertained of having reaped his contempt from the very scheme she had laid to secure him. He did not express this openly, indeed; but there was a certain change in his manner towards her, since she had become Mr Ferrier's wife, which she did not fail to mark, and which filled her with indignation. He was not so respectful as he had been; he treated her, not with actual

coarseness, but with that sort of *camaraderie* which she had noticed to prevail among a certain class of men—the artists, for instance—just as if she *were a man*. This was intolerable to her; she felt it as keenly as any innocent girl insulted by a rude jest; and yet she could not resent it; could not ask him what he meant by such a change. For suppose he was to tell her?

It was infamous of him; it was cowardly; for supposing she *had* planned this scheme, this man had assented to it, and what right had he now to turn round and despise her for having carried it out—thus far? She had nothing to urge as a reason for his departure save her great love for him, out of respect for which, out of pity for the pain it caused her, she besought him to leave her to bear her lot alone. It was surely as tender a confession as woman could make to man, and ought to have availed her at once. But ‘Why *should* he leave Glen Druid?’ was his half-obstinate,

half-careless inquiry. What his tone seemed to her sensitive ear to imply was : 'What did it matter if her reputation *should* be imperilled ; if their confidential walks and talks together *should* be remarked upon ; if society *should* begin to look askance at her ? What then ? She could hold her own, and be very agreeable company *out of* society.'

Perhaps he did not mean to imply this, or at least all of it ; but he had certainly a way with him which he would not have used had she been still Gwendoline Treherne. She conquered at last, as she always did, when the whole force of her will was pitted against his ; but the victory was only just gained, and, as it were, by a dead-lift. When she had won it, and he had promised to depart the next day, she began to wish that she had lost it. For how was the life she led to be endured without him ? Moreover, she was tortured with the thought, that when away from

her he would forget her, would be unfaithful to her. It was already evident enough that he was tired of waiting for her.

As for the rest of the gay folks, they were got away easily enough, by help of Dr Gisborne. They were made to understand that illness of some sort was threatening Glen Druid, and made off like rats from a sinking ship. The doctor himself always denied it; but he, or somebody, circulated a report—which was somewhat corroborated by Marion, always delicate, being kept in bed with a sore throat one morning—that there was scarlet fever in the nursery. Lady Luttrell would have offered to stay and nurse the children, but that her husband, reasonably enough, forbade it; but with the rest, including Sir Guy himself, it was *sauve qui peut*. The house was cleared in twenty-four hours.

Mr Ferrier, though ignorant of the cause of his guests' departure, was undoubtedly relieved by it. He was glad to

be left once more in quiet, and to the enjoyment of the society of his wife, of whom, as a hostess with many duties, he had of late seen very little. On their first evening alone, Dr Gisborne, always a welcome visitor, chanced to drop in. He had not been much with them whilst the house was full; perhaps that passage-at-arms with my Lord Chillington, the remembrance of which, however, always made the doctor laugh, had a little vexed him; and beside that, he had been a fortnight in France, on a visit to Duvergier, the great analyst.

‘We are delighted to see you, doctor, since you don’t come *as* a doctor, but as a friend,’ said Mr Ferrier warmly. ‘I don’t think my wife has been quite easy, on account of the children, all the time you have been away; she has no confidence in anybody but you.’

‘My dear Mr Ferrier, your wife has confidence in herself, which is worth all the faith in doctors twice over; but I do

flatter myself she is glad to see me back.'

'That is not flattery, since it is honest fact,' said Gwendoline simply. 'I have heard nothing but small-talk for three months. Do, doctor, now tell us something worth hearing. I have scarcely seen you since you have been in France. What did you do there?'

'Well, *I* did nothing, Mrs Ferrier; but what I saw done was one of the most curious things you can imagine; indeed, nobody *could* imagine it. It was rather horrible, however.'

'That's delightful!' exclaimed Gwendoline, clapping her hands together like cymbals to her laugh-music. 'I love horrible stories.' And she seated herself playfully on the footstool at Mr Ferrier's feet, who laid his hand upon her silken head, and smiled with pleasure at her girlish joy. It was seldom that the stately Gwendoline unbent her dignity so far, even to her husband.

‘I will give you a *tableau* out of my story, instead of the story itself,’ said the doctor slowly. ‘It is a very striking one; the most striking save one that I ever witnessed; and you shall guess it, just as though it were one of those charades that were acted here a month ago or so. Imagine a provincial town in France, with every shop shut up, and every window (though that was from another cause), and all the people out of their houses assembled in an open space in front of the Palais de Justice, or crowding the little heights that command it. They are all intently gazing upon what is going on in the centre of this space. Five furnaces are ranged there in a circle, and supplied with charcoal from a huge brazier, which is constantly kept at a red heat: a dense and fetid vapour overhangs all; but in front of the furnaces are chemists with their alembics.’

‘My dear doctor, I have guessed it,’ said Mr Ferrier with a movement express-

ive of disgust. 'I read the whole account of the horrid thing in the papers.'

'But *I* have not read it. Oh, please, let the doctor go on, Bruce. I *am* so interested. What could all these people have been about?'

'They were employed in the detection of an infamous crime—a murder,' continued the doctor gravely. 'Within the court-house, the scene was almost as curious. It was crammed with spectators, as the streets were, and at least one-half of these were ladies—not only women, I mean, but ladies of fashion. There was scarcely a poor person in the court, into which it cost an unofficial person a napoleon to enter. The gentlemen, as well as the ladies, all held a smelling-bottle, which they almost constantly applied to their nose, for the odour from without filled the whole place. I was told that seven hundred smelling-bottles were sold in Tulle that morning.'

‘I really think, doctor,’ remonstrated Mr Ferrier uneasily, ‘you might spare Gwendoline these details.’

The doctor laughed good-humouredly ; he was thinking how ill this old gentleman appreciated the strength of his wife’s character, and how little he guessed with what strange stories he (the doctor) had regaled her before now.

‘Very well,’ he said ; ‘so be it. Perhaps I am a little too professional in my narration, but Duvergier sent for me expressly to take part in some of his experiments connected with the affair in question. The French analysts are certainly far in advance of us—that is, the best of them ; for indeed these provincial chemists would have done nothing of themselves. It was Orfila and Duvergier, as you may remember, Mr Ferrier, and not they, who discovered arsenic in every portion of the body.’

‘Body ! What body ?’ inquired Gwen-

doline with interest. 'This is no charade; this is a positive riddle—and I cannot guess it.'

'Stop a little,' said the doctor. 'In the middle of this court-house is a lady of surpassing beauty, and not twenty years of age, and upon her all eyes are directed. She is dressed in elegant mourning; her handkerchief is edged with black lace, and her smelling-bottle is of black and gold. Beside her stands a young and handsome advocate, who is pleading her cause with enthusiastic eloquence. He is pleading for her life, for she is a criminal at the bar of justice, accused of—'

'It is Madame Laffarge,' exclaimed Gwendoline with an involuntary shudder.

'There, you see you have given her quite a shock, Gisborne,' said Mr Ferrier angrily. 'I am really astonished at your imprudence.'

'Nay; don't scold the doctor,' said Gwendoline, lifting her white hand above

her head, the fingers of which the old man pressed fondly to his lips. 'Of course, I was shocked, but I am also immensely interested. I heard Lord Luttrell talking about the case only the other day; but then he tells stories so ill. Now, pray, go on with your narrative, doctor. I must hear the end, now you have got so far.'

'Well, I have told you the worst, my dear Mrs Ferrier. The rest was all in the French style, and more like what one sees in a stage-play than the genuine drama of life. When Madame Laffarge's counsel closed his defence, which he did in tears, the audience all rose and cheered him; and when the commissioners, who had been sent down for the purpose, and before whom the case was tried, announced that no poison had been detected in the exhumed remains, and thereby acquitted the lady, the court rose at her as the pit does in a theatre at some favourite actress,

and screamed themselves hoarse with applause.'

'But I thought she was found guilty after all?' observed Gwendoline carelessly, her interest having apparently ceased with the result of the trial.

'She was acquitted at Tulle, but she was tried a few days afterward in Paris, when Duvergier and the rest were the analysts; and, as I said, they found arsenic in every portion of the body that was submitted to them. There was not a doubt about her guilt; but she was young and beautiful, and poor Monsieur Laffarge'—the doctor was within a hair-breadth of drawing a very unpleasant parallel, but saved himself with nimble dexterity—'and poor Monsieur Laffarge had been very unpopular, and indeed deserved to be so.'

'I forget whether they hung the wretched woman?' observed Mr Ferrier.

'Nay, they don't hang in France. Did they put her to death? you would

ask. Well, though, in my opinion, she richly deserved it, they did not. They found—in her youth and beauty, I suppose—“extenuating circumstances.” She was condemned to hard labour for life, and exposure in the pillory.’

‘Poor wretch!’ sighed Mr Ferrier pitifully; ‘that must have been worse than death itself to one like her.’

‘Not at all,’ returned Dr Gisborne, positively. ‘There you are quite mistaken: in your eyes, of course, it seems so; but *not* to one like her. There is nothing which scoundrels of both sexes fear so much as Death, and what may happen afterward. There are some well-meaning folks who would do away with capital punishment. If they effect their object, and the good results which they anticipate do not flow, I only hope that future murderers will confine their attentions to their friends, or let a law be passed that henceforth nobody shall be hung for murdering

those who object to capital punishment : that would meet everybody's views. Every crime should have its fit penalty, and it should never be made a matter of indifference to the criminal whether he add murder—to which there is always a temptation, from the impunity it insures—to his offence or not.'

' Yet those two convicts spared my life and Fanny's that night at Bedivere Court,' observed Gwendoline, ' although they had already committed murder.'

' Nay, only one of them had—that is, as a principal ; and he, according to your own account, would have cut your throat without remorse. The other, who had been only an accessory to the previous crime, was your protector, if you remember. Thus, your experience only corroborates my argument. Of course, there are some persons who have really no fear of death at all, and whom, therefore, capital punishment would not deter. The Chinese

go to the scaffold quite philosophically, and smoke their cheroots to the last moment. In 1805, I was invited by the surgeon in Newgate to visit a man named Heygate, under sentence of death there. It was a very curious study. In all my travels, I never saw so great a savage. He tried to strangle his keeper the night before he was hung; he terrified the ordinary by his blasphemies, and even upon the scaffold reproached his fellow-criminal for listening to the good man; and he cheered heartily as he kicked off his shoes, to prevent the fulfilment of some prophecy of his friends that he would die in them. But I would hang these philosophers, notwithstanding their stoicism; nay, even because of it, since such creatures must be all the more difficult to deter from crime. The fact is, however, these merely brutish natures are very rare. Our murderers fear the rope above all things; and Madame Laffarge would have shrunk from the

guillotine far more than from the pillory and the galleys.'

Mr Ferrier was not a man to feel much interest in criminal psychology, nor indeed to be interested in any abstract question whatever. His success in life had been chiefly owing to a nature essentially practical, and which had never been diverted from the object of its pursuit by theoretical ideas. He yawned, and muttered something about having a letter of importance to write that night, but the doctor was too occupied with his topic to remark it.

'These poisoners all seem so stupid,' remarked Mr Ferrier impatiently, and as though stupidity had been the worst feature in a poisoner's character: 'they always get found out.'

'Not always,' said Dr Gisborne gravely; 'not nearly so often as you imagine. It is not that science fails in her mission, nor even the police, but crimes

are often smoothed—even very great ones—from social considerations.'

'Now shall we hear, my dear Gwendoline,' said Mr Ferrier, smiling, 'that the aristocracy of this country are greatly given to putting folks out of the way by violence. I am quite sure that is what our radical friend here is about to tell us.'

'Not at all, my dear sir,' replied the doctor, laughing. 'Murder is quite an exceptional peccadillo even with them. But I have seen some examples of it too. I had once the honour of being called in to attend an English *milord*, travelling on the continent, and suffering from a very curious disease; he was wasting away into his grave, and none could guess the cause of it. A female relative in whom he placed every confidence recited his case to me with the most tender emotion, and entreated my aid, since there were none but foreign physicians to attend upon him. I paid him a visit accordingly, but could

make nothing of his symptoms, unless (which seemed very improbable) he was suffering from the effects of some irritant poison. For some days I found nothing to corroborate this view; but presently he happened to let fall the fact that he had bequeathed his fair companion a handsome independence after his death. Then I watched her as narrowly as I watched my patient. She was so devoted to him (he said), that she even prepared his food for him with her own hands. I analyzed the food, but found nothing of a suspicious character; and the milord grew worse every day. At last, when I knew the lady would be absent for a few hours, I entered her apartments, and made a most minute examination. I found two of the chairs exceedingly flat, as if the stuffing had been taken out of them; and, in a locked drawer, I came upon a small box, with a sort of sausage-machine inside it, but of the most fairy proportions. Upon the

cutting instrument, which was as sharp as a razor, and apparently as clean, I detected, by help of the microscope, something which solved the mystery. She was accustomed to chop horsehair exceedingly fine, and mix it with his lordship's food. This irritated the stomach unceasingly, and would have killed him in about a fortnight from the time I made the discovery. To all intents and purposes, the woman was, of course, a murderess. Yet her intended victim not only declined to prosecute her, but retained her in the same confidential position as she occupied before, except that he relieved her from the duties of the cuisine. "I don't like chopped horsehair in my dishes, Julie," said he quietly; and she understood him at once, and cheerfully acceded to the new arrangement, which exists, I believe, to this day.'

'There is another instance of stupidity in poisoners,' observed Mr Ferrier, 'to use

a sausage-machine and chop up the stuffing of the chairs ! Why did she not give him some slow poison ?’

‘ Because there is no such thing, my dear sir ; it is only the novelists who describe people being put out of the world by degrees. The operation cannot be suspended, as is vulgarly supposed, but must needs manifest itself within a very short period.’

‘ Then why did not his lady-friend give him prussic acid ?’ asked Mr Ferrier, with that testy obstinacy which a dull man so often exhibits coincidently with his ignorance. ‘ A few drops would have secured her legacy in half a minute—or even a few seconds—would it not ?’

‘ Well, not necessarily so soon as that. I have read of an instance—I think Taylor quotes it—of a man who walked about and smoked a pipe after a large dose of it. But its action is very rapid ; so rapid, indeed, that death by prussic acid almost

inevitably excites suspicion and produces inquiry.'

'And yet you doctors give it to your patients, do you not?' said Mr Ferrier, yawning. 'I have heard it spoken of as being a remedy—or, at all events, a mitigation—for some complaints.'

'We prescribe it occasionally, without doubt, and find it very useful. Poison *v.* Palsy is a case often tried in medicine; and for palpitation of the heart it is recommended, but, of course, only in the smallest quantities: one drop in a wine-glass of water, for instance, would be a sufficient dose.'

'Just so,' said Mr Ferrier carelessly.—
'Gwendoline, my dear, I must leave you to do the honours to Dr Gisborne, while I write a letter of importance, which I shall get him to be good enough to post for me at St Medards;' and, stooping down, he touched the forehead of his young wife with his lips, and left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESCRIPTION.

‘CAN you guess why my husband left the room so abruptly?’ inquired Gwendoline as soon as Dr Gisborne and herself were left alone in the drawing-room.

‘Well, I am afraid I can; I believe my anecdotes began to bore him. The fact is, you have spoiled me, my dear Mrs Ferrier, by always listening so patiently to my long stories; it makes me fancy that they must have an interest for other people; I really believe I have driven your husband out of the room with them.’

‘No, no; it was not that,’ answered

Gwendoline with a sigh: 'I will tell you why he left us presently ; but in the mean time finish your budget of experiences. You can't imagine what a pleasure it is to listen to you, after the flood of fashionable twaddle that has of late been poured into my ears. You were saying that that scene at Tulle was the *second* most striking spectacle that you ever beheld ; what, then, was the most striking of all ?'

'My dear Mrs Ferrier,' returned the doctor smiling, 'since the days of the sultan in the *Arabian Nights*, there has certainly been no such insatiable listener as yourself.' But it was plain the doctor was flattered nevertheless, and pleased enough to pursue his reminiscences at the bidding of one as appreciative as she was beautiful. 'Well, let me see,' mused he ; 'yes—the strangest scene to which I was ever witness was the examination of Mademoiselle D'Arcy. That was about ten years ago, in Paris. Her story was a

very sad and unpleasant one, and there is no need to speak of it: what was most remarkable in the case was the *time* during which the proceedings in the court of law were conducted. She had been very ill treated and almost frightened to death by the scoundrel against whom she was bearing witness, and the effect of the shock had been to make her cataleptic. She was only in a condition to appear and answer questions at stated intervals—namely, from midnight to four in the morning. The court, therefore, in Paris, rose at the close of the usual day's proceedings, and adjourned to the hour in question; but in the mean while the whole audience remained fixed in their seats. Then, at twelve o'clock at night, to see that beautiful young woman—just out of her death-trance, as it were—brought in to give her evidence, and to know that in a few hours she would again sink into a state without sense or motion—ah! it was a most piti-

ful spectacle indeed. But, however, the villain was found guilty, which was some comfort.'

'That is the case with most people who commit crimes, is it not? Even if, as you were saying, they occasionally escape punishment, still they are found out by somebody?'

'Yes; the most artful and well-planned scheme of villainy has generally some flaw in it, and often some gross mistake, which you would think would never have been committed by any one in his senses.'

'But may not that be done on purpose, in order that if the worst came to the worst, to get off on the plea of insanity?'

'I hardly think that, though, indeed, any excuse of that sort is always made the most of. For my part, I would have all persons who commit murder—that is, without great provocation, I mean—put to death, whether they are "homicidal maniacs" or not. If they are sane, they

deserve it ; if they are really mad, they would suffer nothing from the apprehension of death (which is the real torture), and they would be delivered by it from a life of misery. In this world they can do nothing but harm ; and as for their future it is surely safe to leave them in the hands of Him who made them.'

'I had no idea you were so harsh a man,' said Gwendoline, with a slight shudder. 'You seem to be all for justice, and to have no pity.'

'Your remark, my dear Mrs Ferrier, is more severe upon Providence than upon myself. It is God who is all-merciful, and who will make allowance where our judgment is too hard. As for me, my pity, I confess, is exhausted by the victim, and I have none left for the murderer.—But we were talking of what follies criminals will sometimes commit in the execution of their atrocities. Taylor tells us of an hospital nurse who murdered a patient in the

most artful manner, so that the occurrence would certainly have been taken for suicide but for one circumstance. After having committed the crime, she mechanically "laid out" the patient, as she was professionally accustomed to do, smoothed the clothes, straightened the arms with the palms open, and so forth. Not even the tidiest person ever committed suicide in that way; and so, on the evidence she had herself supplied, the poor nurse was hanged. That is, of course, an extreme case of criminal mismanagement; but it is much more difficult to conceal a crime than folks are apt to imagine. Nature herself even sometimes appears as a witness, and points out the offender in a terribly straightforward fashion. A man was once charged with the murder of a woman, who kept house in the City for a firm who only used it during the daytime. The key of the front-door was found upon his person, and it was found that with that very

weapon the deed must have been committed — thus. The ecchymosis — the bruise, that is — upon the victim's face had actually taken the very shape of the wards of the key. It was one of the neatest cases for Law and Medicine to go hand and hand together in, we can possibly imagine. However, I have only read of the thing, and so cannot answer for its truth.'

'Ah! I like to hear you tell of what you have seen with your own eyes, doctor. Now what is the most singular affair in which you yourself, not as a witness, but as one of the parties concerned, have ever been personally engaged?'

'My dear Mrs Ferrier, you rather puzzle me: I have been concerned in so many queer things. Do you mean by the most singular the most terrible?'

'Well, if you insist on my confessing how fond I am of Horrors, yes.'

'The most trying ordeal I ever underwent,' returned the doctor, 'was, curiously

enough, a scientific experiment. It was in the endeavour to observe the moment of what is called somatic death—that is, when the action of the heart ceases—in a man that has been hanged. It was in Albany, in the United States, that this opportunity presented itself. A criminal condemned to death there, was placed by the authorities at the disposal of science to this extent; he was hanged in a passage of the prison, only twelve inches from the ground, and the jail surgeon and myself stood, one on each side of the poor wretch, with our fingers on his pulse. Yes, that was certainly the most sensational adventure in which I was ever engaged. In the fifth minute there were a hundred and twenty-eight pulsations.—There, I think I have told you shocking stories enough. I don't know what your husband would say if he had been listening to them; he does not at all share your taste for the terrible.'

‘No,’ said Gwendoline, smiling; ‘yet we continue to agree pretty well together, notwithstanding that defect in his character.’

‘Agree! Why, my dear Mrs Ferrier—for I must not call you Gwendoline now—you are a model couple; that is what everybody says, and, for once, I am prepared to own that everybody is right. You have exceeded even *my* expectations—an old friend like me may say so—as wife and step-mother; and you know that I used to “pass my life in defending you,” before your marriage. And yet, dear me, it seems only the other day that you were quite a child. Well, I am glad to have had this “crack,” as your husband would call it, alone with you; it reminds one of the old days at Bedivere; does it not?—My dear Mrs Ferrier, what is the matter? I hope to heaven that you do not regret them?’ The kind old doctor took Gwendoline’s hand in his, and stroked it ten-

derly, for the large tears were rolling down her cheeks.'

'No, doctor,' said she fervently, 'I do *not* regret them; I am happier now than ever I was in my life—if the cause were only removed for which I weep; and I think that it lies in your power to remove it.'

'Then consider it already removed, dear Gwendoline,' said the doctor affectionately. 'I have always considered myself *in loco parentis* to you—a sort of flying buttress of a father, and feel none the less so because you have married Mr Ferrier—a good husband, I am sure, if ever there was one.'

'Yes, indeed, doctor; the best of husbands; and a far better one than I deserve. It is because I respect, nay, reverence him so deeply, that I am now in sorrow. I can think of nothing else—I could not even listen to what you have been telling me just now, though I bade you go on

with your stories. I wished to put off as long as possible the moment which has now arrived, when I have to speak of my husband's illness.'

'His illness! surely you are mistaken there. Mr Ferrier is, without doubt, more feeble and languid than I should wish to see him; and I am glad, for his sake, that all those fine folks have left the house; but a little quiet will soon bring him round, believe me.'

Gwendoline shook her head with a sad smile. 'Perhaps there is not much the matter, doctor; but there is more than you think. Do you recollect what you had been saying, when he rose and left the room so abruptly, about palpitation of the heart?'

'Yes; I said that a drop of prussic acid in a wine-glass of water was sometimes given in such cases.'

'Just so. Then he got up at once, if you remember. He did so, I feel certain,

because he was afraid of my speaking of his symptoms to you in his presence. You know his morbid horror—so different from papa—of being doctored, or having anything said of his own ailments. Yet Bruce's notion is that he has got heart-disease.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' exclaimed Dr Gisborne decisively. 'That's all his fancy; he has nothing of the sort.'

'I am truly delighted to hear you say so; but he is fully persuaded that he *has*. It may be, as you say, only his fancy; but you know what a strong hold such fancies take in old—in those who are not young. Bruce is exceedingly nervous and worried about himself, and, of course, that worries *me*.'

'You astonish me, my dear Mrs Ferrier, with this account of your husband. I should have thought that if there had been one man in the world less subject to morbid notions about the state of his own health, it was Bruce Ferrier.'

‘But then you are not his wife, you know,’ sighed Gwendoline, with a faint smile. ‘To you he would doubtless always appear so. If you were to offer to prescribe for him now, he would protest there was nothing the matter with him; men are so queer. He got almost angry the other day when I proposed that he should consult you on the matter: but yet he himself proposed the very remedy of which you were just speaking—and it was a most curious coincidence your happening to do so—of a drop of prussic acid in water. He certainly does suffer from palpitation; but then, as I told him, nothing should induce me to let him try so dangerous a remedy without your approval. Now, if you will only humour him so far as to write out a prescription, I will take care that he does not take the medicine oftener than is absolutely necessary. I dare say, if the palpitations are mere nervousness, that the knowledge that

he has the remedy at hand will be sufficient without actually taking it.'

'Yes,' mused the doctor thoughtfully: 'of course, there can be no harm in his taking one drop (which of course you will see he does not exceed) in a wine-glass of water. But I don't much like recommending such a dangerous medicine; there are others—'

'You will do as you think proper, of course, dear Dr Gisborne; but I must say that I am afraid that nothing *but* prussic acid will satisfy Bruce. He has taken the whim into his head that that will do him good; and I am sure he will have no confidence in anything else.'

'Then, by all means, my dear Mrs Ferrier, let him be humoured so far.' And Dr Gisborne sat down and wrote the prescription as she had requested. 'I will leave it at the chemist's to-night on my way home, if you wish it,' said he.

'There is no necessity for that; thank

you, doctor,' answered Gwendoline carelessly. 'I shall be driving over to St Medards to-morrow, I have no doubt, and I will call at the shop myself.' Which accordingly, on the afternoon of the ensuing day, Mrs Ferrier did. She was waited upon by Mr Samuel Barland in person, who made up the prescription, and placed the bottle in her own hands. Some weeks afterwards, Gwendoline informed Dr Gisborne with a grateful smile that her husband had scarcely ever complained of palpitations since he had had the remedy in the house; and nothing more was said about the matter.

CHAPTER V.

THE WILL AND THE WAY.

A YEAR has passed since Mr Ferrier's second marriage. He is more devoted to his beautiful wife—whose charms indeed have increased as they have matured—than ever, though the haunting sense that he is unable to cope with her gloved-iron will, grows upon him too. He is placid and happy, except that it somewhat frets him that they have no child.

That Gwendoline's good behaviour is a matter by no means 'put on' for a time, even Mrs Barland is constrained to own; little Eady, now two years old, and mar-

vellously like her Italian mother, is almost as fond of her as is Marion, who is nearly six, a quiet and thoughtful little creature—‘quite a companion,’ as the saying is, to her father, and a most patient playfellow with her small sister.

Strange to say, in the society of this sweet child, with whose affectionate simplicity is mingled a sort of motherly virtue and grown-up good sense, Gwendoline is secretly ill at ease. Her innocence, her unselfish nature, and (especially) her simple trustfulness in herself (Gwendoline), seem so many reproaches to her; they sometimes compel her to reflect—and reflection has become hateful to her. A correspondence is kept up between herself and her lover, but it is mostly on one side—*her* side. Piers writes but seldom, and then only short letters, the tone of which is even more unsatisfactory than the actual contents. He finds the chain that links them—so much more binding in his case

than any legitimate tie would have been—intolerably burdensome, and she perceives it. Yet, she cannot endure to relinquish her designs, and give him up, but is madly devoted to him still. Mr Ferrier has aged considerably, and is growing mentally more feeble, but there is no appearance of their marriage being annulled by the Great Divorcer. Her husband may live on for years. With his feebleness has come over him a touching tenderness of manner and feeling towards all about him; he had never been harsh, but that sturdy matter-of-fact character, which was almost stern, is visibly softening. To Gwendoline, indeed, he has been always tender; and his fond reliance upon her increases, notwithstanding she is more haughty and imperious with him than of old.

They were alone together one evening (as they usually were now), when Mr Ferrier made an unexpected but not un hoped-for communication. ‘My darling,’

said he, 'I dare say you would never guess what I have been so busy about the last few days. I have been making my will.'

'Your will, Bruce?' returned she quietly, though a sudden flush tinged her pale cheeks in spite of herself. 'What made you think of that? There are many years of happiness in store for you yet, I trust.'

'I trust so too, darling—*some* years, at all events. But I am getting an old man, and the hope which I had entertained—But there, let me explain to you what I have done.'

'My dear Bruce, you know that I never could understand business matters; things that are so easy to you, are to me so difficult—I know I shall never comprehend you.' But she pushed aside the embroidery frame at which she was engaged, and gave herself up to listen to him, for all that.

'My darling,' he began again, 'if you

were of a self-seeking and ambitious nature, which I am sure you are not, I should not make known to you, as I am about to do, the disposition of my property, but leave you to learn it after my death; and if you were inclined to be jealous of my dear children, in place of being as good a mother to them as though they were your own flesh and blood, I should also keep silence, for I have considered them in my will far more than I have considered you; still, you will have no reason to complain, I hope.'

'I am sure I shall not, dear Bruce—quite sure. But why should you pain me by talking of such things? you are healthy and strong, and there will be time enough years hence to enter upon this subject.'

'No, dear Gwendoline, there will not—or, at least, there *may* not be time. While my mind is still vigorous and able to attend to such matters, I prefer to speak of them to you. Between us two there

should be no secrets, nor a single subject which we cannot venture to discuss.'

'Of course there should be no secrets,' said Gwendoline. 'But, as respects a will, there always seems to be some embarrassment—'

'I feel none, my darling,' interrupted Mr Ferrier fondly. 'I know that I can never be misunderstood nor misjudged by you. Why not hear from my own lips, what you will certainly hear sooner or later from those of a stranger, while I—when I am lying dead, and you will no longer be chained to an old husband, to whom you may one day, perhaps, have to be as much nurse as wife?'

'I cannot listen to this,' dear Bruce, said Gwendoline, covering her eyes with her right hand, while her husband held her other captive in his own. 'You distress me more than I can say. I would rather even hear the will itself, than such sad talk. Have you got the document

here?—not that it matters : it is sure to be all seals, and tapes, and gibberish.'

Considering that 'it did not matter,' Mrs Ferrier's face wore certainly a look of interest as she put this question, and when the answer came : 'No, darling, I have not got the will, for I sent it to my London lawyer yesterday for safe keeping,' the shadow of a cloud flitted across her brow.

'The conditions, Gwendoline, although very simple, are in the document itself set forth with the usual prolixity, and you will understand them from my mouth far better than in lawyer's phraseology.—Well, then, first with regard to your dear self, you will of course have your jointure ; and in addition I have bequeathed to you sufficient plate and furniture to set up with in a house of your own, should circumstances ever cause the dear girls and you to part.'

'That will never be,' said Gwendoline earnestly.

‘Not while your affectionate care can be of use to them, darling, of that I feel quite assured. But if they were both to marry, for instance, they would doubtless each have establishments separate from your own.’

‘Just so,’ assented Gwendoline; ‘I had forgotten; it seemed so impossible that the dear children and myself should ever live apart.’

‘I have also bequeathed you my jewels: in my poor opinion you should always wear jewels, darling; they become you, and you become them, so fitly. I have also left you what I refused to leave you before we married, and when your unselfish goodness, of which I have now had so satisfactory an experience, was comparatively untried—I have left you sole guardian to my two daughters.’

A light of triumph, which she strove in vain to quench, came into Gwendoline’s eyes.

‘ Yes, darling, that is your just reward, and I am glad to see how much it pleases you. You are their sole guardian ; but I have appointed Mr Tudor, my lawyer, your co-trustee. While my daughters are under age, you will be allowed four thousand pounds a year for their maintenance and education, which sum, in case of the demise of either, will not be reduced. Glen Druid is also to be maintained as your residence, at the expense of the estate, and on its present footing. The remainder of the income accruing from the property is to be invested in government securities, for the benefit of the children. Even at present, I am able to leave each of them what will represent at least seven thousand pounds a year ; and in the event of either dying under age, the whole will then revert to the survivor, who will have the absolute disposal of it upon her coming of age. In the event of either or both marrying before their majority, this arrange-

ment will still hold good, for I am sure that you will take care that their husbands are honourable and trustworthy persons—to whom, if you can intrust my sweet girls, you may surely intrust their money.'

Gwendoline listened in silence. Mr Ferrier was deeply affected, not only by what he had said, but by what he had in his mind, and was about to say. 'I hope, my darling, that this disposition of my property is such as you approve? I have left you what is more precious to me than all my riches—my Marion and my Edith.'

'You have been most kind, dear Bruce, indeed. I trust that I may prove myself worthy of such affectionate confidence.'

'I have no doubt of that, Gwendoline, not a shadow of doubt. I have only to add, that in case—that in case we should be blessed with a child of our own (though, should we be so, I can hardly fancy your love for it being greater than it is for the little ones which Giulia gave me), this

disposition of my property will of course be materially altered. God has given me much increase in the basket and in the store, and there will be enough and to spare for all.'

It was as much as Mr Ferrier's mental and bodily strength would permit to compass this statement and to express it with clear conciseness. The task was itself an effort, and the considerations which it suggested affected him deeply. It was distressing to him to think of that day (in all human probability, at no great distance) when he should be parted from his Gwendoline.

Mrs Ferrier, too, seemed much distressed by the nature of this communication. For some days afterwards she appeared moody and silent, and when she could be spared from the nursery—which was just now a hospital, since both the children had whooping-cough, though of a mild character—she took long solitary

walks, in the course of which she revolved many things. On one of these occasions she met Susan Barland, to whom her manner was always gracious, while, on the other hand, Susan was respectful and solicitous about her welfare; women in all ranks of life being equal proficient in hypocrisy towards foes of their own sex—and also, it may be added, as equally failing to impose upon one another.

Susan was quite distressed at seeing Mrs Ferrier look so poorly, and ‘unlike herself.’

‘Well, Susan,’ answered she frankly, ‘I am not well; there is nothing amiss with my bodily health indeed, but I am sadly worried. I don’t mind telling *you*, who are such an old friend of the family, but Mr Ferrier’s state of health makes me very uneasy. He has got his old palpitations again, and is constantly complaining of giddiness, and it is *so* difficult to know what to do—to make him take care of

himself without frightening him, which would be the worst thing in the world, and indeed, with his heart-disease, might be fatal at any moment.'

'Lor, ma'am, has Mr Ferrier got heart-disease?' exclaimed Susan, really shocked by this intelligence.

'Hush, yes: but don't talk about it, for fear it should get round to his own ears, which, to say the least, would annoy him terribly. I hate to talk of it myself, Susan, though I can't help thinking of it, as you perceive.—You are going up to see our little ones, I suppose; they are much better, I am glad to say; but you are always welcome in the nursery, you know, whenever you like to come. I hope they give you a good cup of tea, and treat you well?'

'Very well, I thank you, ma'am.'

'I am delighted to hear it.—We are to have a grand ball—not that it is my wish, but Mr Ferrier says we have seen nothing

of anybody for so long—on the 31st, as I dare say you have heard. If you would like to come up and hear the music, I dare say Jane can make you up a bed somewhere. If Mr Barland will give you leave then—for we who are wives are not our own masters—come by all means.—I hope your husband is well? Good morning, Susan.'

Mrs Barland never conversed with the mistress of Glen Druid except in the shortest sentences, and used as few of them as she decently could. She was always glad to get away from her, as from an adversary with whom she was no match at tongue-fence; and Gwendoline was rather amused at this cowardice than otherwise. She knew that she was no favourite of the woman's; but she made the great mistake of despising her foe: the enmity of no one—and especially of one whom we have wronged, and afterwards patronized—ought to be despised.

Susan did not discredit Mrs Ferrier's statement about her husband, although she entirely rejected the idea that she was looking ill from 'worry' upon his account. The worse he was—in Susan's view—the better Gwendoline would be pleased, for she had only taken him for his money, and when he died, would probably marry that young gentleman whom she had seen her flirting with upon the Warrior's Helm. 'She was a deep one, *she* was, if ever a woman was deep.' Directly Susan got home, she reported to her husband the whole of the late conversation, but with an addendum with respect to his having kept her in the dark about Mr Ferrier's state of health. 'Since,' said she, 'you must have surely known about it, as you make up his prescriptions.'

'Yes,' said he, in his philosophic way, 'I give him something—what is it?—drops—for these palpitations, I suppose. But I don't think there's much amiss with

the old gentleman. Besides, people's diseases are not my business, but only the nasty things they take for 'em. You had better ask Dr Gisborne.'

Accordingly, the next day, when Susan, coming out of the lodge-gates at Glen Druid, happened to meet the doctor, about to pay a professional visit to the nursery, and he, as an old acquaintance, stopped to speak with her, she ventured to ask him point-blank, whether her old master had really heart-disease or not.

'Pooh, pooh!—heart-disease?—No,' was the doctor's reply. 'He has no more heart-disease than I have: it's all stuff; but he is as full of whims as an egg's full of meat.'

'Well, sir, Mrs Ferrier thinks he has, at all events.'

'The more fool she, if she does. Her husband thinks so, I dare say, but then there is no limit to what nervous people

will imagine is the matter with them in the way of disease.'

'Well, sir, at all events, I do hope he will do himself no harm by taking those drops so constant.'

'What! what's that?' exclaimed the doctor, pulling his horse sharply up, just after he had given him the spur. 'What drops?'

'Why them drops for the palpitations. Samuel says he makes them up very constant.'

'I must see to that,' said the doctor gravely. 'It is all very well for folks to be fanciful, but they must not indulge themselves in what is hurtful. I am glad you spoke, Mrs Barland. Good-morning.' And Dr Gisborne was speaking to Gwendoline herself upon the subject within five minutes. 'I say,' exclaimed he, 'what's this I hear about your husband having these drops so often from the chemist's? That won't do, you know, my dear Mrs

Ferrier, at all. I said particularly they were only to be given when he had—or fancied he had—those palpitations.’

‘My dear doctor,’ returned Gwendoline, smiling, ‘how like that is to the stories of your good folks at St Medards! It is a most ludicrous exaggeration, I assure you. The fact is, that the first bottle was accidentally broken, so I ordered a second; and then, fearing a similar misfortune at a time when Bruce might be nervous and uneasy, a third. He has scarcely taken a dose since I told you he was so much better.’

‘Oh, that alters the case; but I think I had better just give him a word of warning.’

‘*Pray* don’t, doctor; I earnestly beg of you not to do so. You have no idea how nervous he is, and the very mention of the subject would, I am confident, be quite sufficient to bring on an attack—to

make him apply the very remedy the use of which you deprecate.'

'Very good,' said Dr Gisborne; 'then I will say nothing more about it; only be careful.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE POSTSCRIPT.

CHRISTMAS had been passed at Glen Druid unmarked by any unusual festivities; but it was understood that the ball on the 31st was to be a very grand affair. The ideas that had been inculcated in Mr Ferrier's youth in Scotland, caused him to think much of New-year's eve ; and Gwendoline had spoken truth when she said it was at her husband's own desire that the invitations had been issued—some for dinner, but of course by far the largest number for the ball and supper that were to follow. At least two hundred of the *élite*

of the county and neighbourhood were asked 'to see the old year out and the new year in' at Glen Druid, and great preparations were made for their reception. Gwendoline, as was her custom, was dressed betimes, so early, indeed, that no guest could be expected for the next half-hour. Magnificently attired, she sat in her boudoir like a queen in her royal bower—her bouquet by her side, and pen in hand. It was a strange time for writing; but a sudden eager desire to do so had seized her, and she did not balk it, and yet she was not one to indulge herself in a mere whim. Let us look over her bare bright shoulder, smooth as marble, white as snow, and see what she is writing. It is a letter; and her pen flies so fast that she has already reached the second page.

'Are you thinking of me, Piers, as I am thinking of you?—No. It is not to be expected, you will say.—But are you thinking of me *at all*? Your cousin Maude

is staying with you at Luttrell—I know that, though you omitted to mention it—and I hate her.’ The last three words were dashed out with one fierce stroke of the pen as soon as written, and then most carefully obliterated. ‘Forgive my petulance, my darling. If you knew what I have suffered, what I suffer now, you could forgive me everything. You would be kinder, warmer, and more loving in what you write ; for I know you do love me dearly. And I— But I can never tell you how I love you. I dare not think about you, and yet you are the only one I care to think of. To-night there is a party here—a dinner, and then a ball. I would rather be pacing the moorland all night long, than be doing what I shall have to do—receive all these dull folks, smile, talk, be civil, and play out the part expected of a pattern hostess. This dignified respectability costs me what you can imagine to keep up ; but that is the least

of my troubles. Piers, I cannot stand this life much longer; indeed, I cannot. It is driving me mad. I swear to you that even the poverty from which I once shrank appalled would be welcome rather than this loathsome existence of pretence and suspense. I—'

Here the noise of the great hall bell rang through the house, announcing the arrival of some early guest, for, in the country, folks cannot time their distance so easily as all to arrive within five minutes. Gwendoline put the half-finished note away into her escritoir, and locked it. Then she rose, and stood before the mirror, with a candle raised above her head. It was a glorious sight that she beheld there; and in spite of her bitter thoughts, the spectacle of her own transcendent beauty brought a flush of triumph to her cheek.

The diamonds which her husband said she ought to wear at all times were sparkling in her hair and on her fair bosom; her

dress was costly and brilliant, and became her to a marvel. She was scarcely one-and-twenty, but all the charm of full-grown womanhood was added to the grace of youth.

‘Yes, darling, you are beautiful indeed!’ exclaimed a fond admiring voice; and Mr Ferrier, who had come in from his dressing-room unobserved, laid his hand lightly and lovingly upon her bare shoulder. She shrank from it as from some adder’s fang, dropped the light with an expression almost of loathing, and rushed out of the room. The hated touch of her husband’s hand, taking her unawares at such a moment, had been too much for her, and for the first time in her married life she had been thrown off her guard.

For the first time, too, Mr Ferrier felt dimly doubtful of his wife’s affection, hazily suspicious and annoyed. He passed his hand over his rugged forehead, and sat down perplexed and bewildered. What

could it all mean ? Had his sudden coming upon her frightened her, as it were, out of her wits, so that she knew not what she was doing ? or had it made her what he had never known her to be before—petulant and angry with him ? But the look she had given him was not one of terror, nor of anger ; it had been worse than either. It was one of unmistakable dislike and disgust. What *could* it mean ? His eyes rolled aimlessly round the room, where the pictures were still hanging which his Giulia had prized so highly, and the sight of them brought his dead wife to his mind. He had almost forgotten her ; the last years of his life had seemed to comprise the main part of his existence ; the remainder, wherein there had been no Gwendoline, had sunk into insignificance. Yet Giulia had never given him a glance like that. The old man was cut to the heart. He tried to reason with himself—to make excuses for his beautiful idol—in vain.

Again the noise of the front-door bell was heard, and he made an effort to rouse himself, and succeeded ; he went down-stairs slowly and sadly, yet with a firm step, to receive his guests. His wife was already in the drawing-room, wreathed in smiles, and she had a particularly loving one for him as he came in. He smiled again, not bitterly, but with a touching pathos. The thought was chilling his heart, that he had done wrong—being old enough to be her grandfather—to wed this fair and youthful creature ; and he blamed himself, not her. He did the honours of the feast with courteous gravity, but that was all. He could not exercise that splendid hospitality so genially as had been his wont. His spirit was broken within him.

His looks and manner did not escape unobserved. Everybody remarked how ill and aged Mr Ferrier was looking. The reports that had been circulated of late about his failing health had, it seemed,

been only too true. It was a comfort, however, to reflect (they said) that he had so affectionate and devoted a wife; she would nurse him as no other would nor could. How touching it was to see those tender glances she cast towards him, which he had hardly the power to return! Then, again, after dinner, when the children were brought down, how delightedly they went to their step-mother! What a favourite she evidently was with them, and how excellently she behaved! Whatever happened, Mrs Ferrier would certainly have nothing to reproach herself with. It was seldom one saw a match where there was such disproportion in the ages so pre-eminently a happy one; and, besides that, here were the children by the first wife as dear to the second as though they had been her own!

For all her anxiety, too, upon her husband's account — which was patent enough — how successfully she exerted

herself as hostess! She suffered no shadow of her own trouble to fall upon that brilliant scene. It was only in conversation with one or two after dinner, that she expressed the extent of her solicitude about him, for which all agreed she had good cause. When the dancing began, he sent her in a little note by his valet, to say that he had gone to bed—feeling somewhat fatigued, not ill—and that he did not wish to be disturbed. She communicated this intelligence to those about her: the host was duly sympathized with, but the ball proceeded none the less gaily for the absence of that gray pained face. Gwendoline made herself doubly attentive to her guests, and was seen in every part of the ball-room, but she did not dance. This was regretted, but it was no wonder. ‘She could have no spirits for that, poor thing.’

About midnight, and just before supper-time, she passed unnoticed into the

conservatory, which happened to be deserted, lingered a few moments there, and then, slipping off her lace-shawl, hung it on the corner of one of the flower-stands, so that any one passing by the richly curtained doorway would imagine she was still standing in her place. But she went out by a small door, leading to a side staircase, and was away perhaps five minutes. Her absence was quite unnoticed; and she returned, resumed her scarf, and stood in the doorway looking at the dancers. Her colour was high, but it was borrowed. Miss Blackett, who was sitting near—sharp-eyed, and, not having been asked to dinner, perhaps sharp-tempered—remarked upon this to her brother Alexander, who not only chivalrously undertook Gwendoline's defence, but almost instantly joined her. He never could see anything amiss in Mrs Ferrier.

Supper was a prolonged affair; and after supper, dancing recommenced, and

was continued far into the small-hours. Not till the last guest had gone did Gwendoline retire to the dressing-room, where, since her husband was not to be disturbed, she was to sleep upon a sofa-bed. Her maid, of course, attended her, and it was strange how many things her mistress seemed to want that night, though all lay close at hand, and how disinclined she seemed to be left alone. When no other excuse was left to her for retaining the girl's services, she was suddenly attacked by toothache, so severe and excruciating, that nobody with any feeling—certainly no servant with any respect for her mistress—could have deserted her in such a plight. Until day dawned, in fact, her maid never left Mrs Ferrier's room, or lost sight of her for a single instant. It was harsh and exacting of Gwendoline, and quite foreign to her character as a mistress, to keep the poor girl up so, but her pain was so intense and continuous that one could scarcely

wonder at it; and, indeed, when the dull gray dawn had broadened into day, Gwendoline could stand it no longer, but bade her tap at Mr Ferrier's door, and acquaint him with her pitiable condition.

It was then, for the first time in her life, that, had you seen Gwendoline, you would scarcely have thought her beautiful. With cheeks as white as the pillow on which they lay, she crouched in her sofa-bed like some hunted animal, watching with staring eyes and haggard face for the answer which did not come. 'Knock again,' said she, in a sort of hoarse and hissing whisper: 'louder, louder.' Then, 'Open the door, and go in.' And now she sat up in bed, a ghastly object indeed, such as no mere sleepless night could have made her, and listened with awful intensity for the scream that she knew must come. And scream on scream from the terrified girl came soon enough. She was for flying down-stairs, but her mistress sternly

forbade it, and insisted upon her remaining, upon her accompanying her into the room, where Mr Ferrier lay a dead man, and had been lying dead for hours. The horror of that scene was far too shocking to be faced alone.

The house was easily roused, for some of the domestics had not thought it worth while to go to bed at all, and Dr Gisborne was sent for. The news spread like wild-fire at St Medards; and one of the first who came to Glen Druid, on the heels of the doctor, was Susan Barland. She deeply regretted now that she had not accepted Mrs Ferrier's invitation to sleep at Glen Druid the previous night, though what indeed (as she asked herself at the same time) could she have done? As she entered the hall-door, the servant was placing the letters in the post-bag, some of them, doubtless, bearing the sad news to Miss Ferrier and Sir Guy. Among them, Susan's sharp eye discovered a super-

scription in Mrs Ferrier's handwriting, *The Hon. Piers Mostyn, Luttrell Hall*. A shudder ran through her honest frame as she caught sight of it. 'She has written to her lover,' groaned she to herself, 'before her husband is cold. I always thought she was a wicked woman, and now I am sure of it. My poor old master is past help; all I can now pray is, *God help my poor lady's children.*'

In this charge against Mrs Ferrier, however, as we are aware, Mrs Barland was not quite right: she was exaggerating matters. Gwendoline had almost finished her letter the night before, and that morning had only *added a postscript*.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE THE CORONER.

SIR Guy Treherne, who had left Glen Druid that very morning one of the latest guests, had not long finished his usual elaborate preparations for retiring to repose, when he was called up again by an express from his daughter; and poor Adolphe had to see him through his still more elaborate toilet. The baronet was really shocked at the sad news; not that he had had any particular regard for his late son-in-law, but because Mr Ferrier and himself were exactly of the same age; and one being thus suddenly removed, the

other quaked for fear. In other respects, the occurrence was advantageous, for, however Gwendoline was left, she would undoubtedly have a great command of money. On the whole, paternal affection had never asserted itself within Sir Guy so powerfully as now. His daughter and himself — thus his reflections ran — had always been on the best of terms with one another; she had had the benefit of his best advice at all times, and he was now about to receive the reward of his fatherly care of her in a handsome annuity, and in the settlement of his debts. He had lived at home of late, and had abstained from imposing his presence upon his son-in-law and daughter, because, yes—though Glen Druid did undoubtedly bore him—because man and wife were happier alone. Such delicate consideration and self-denial could not surely have escaped Gwendoline's notice; and now, on the other hand, that she was bereaved and in trouble, he had

not lost a moment in hastening to comfort her, though she must be well aware how repugnant it was to his feelings to pay a visit at such a time. He did not expect to find her inconsolable, nor did she pretend to be so; but she was evidently much moved by what had happened. Any one could see how difficult it was for her to maintain that deportment of decorous calm, and yet she did maintain it. Her nerves were shaken, for certainly Mr Ferrier's death had been awfully sudden, though not *wholly* unexpected. All who had been at the dinner party on the previous night had noticed how very ill their host had looked; all who had been at the ball were aware that he had absented himself from it on account of indisposition. It had been observed for months before that Mr Ferrier was aging and ailing, and, in fact, gradually breaking up. Perhaps it was chiefly on account of his being struck down at the very

moment when his hospitable roof was the scene of such gaiety, that the occurrence excited any wonder at all. There was something so incongruous and horrible in the idea of his lying dead on his bed while his guests were dancing in the ball-room beneath; and yet this, by all accounts, must have actually been the case.

So much was already known of the circumstances of his decease, but there was much more, and worse, to be disclosed. Dr Gisborne had come down, after his professional investigation, into the darkened sitting-room, where Sir Guy and Gwendoline were sitting, and was conversing with them upon the all-absorbing topic, but as Mrs Ferrier at once perceived, disconnectedly and abstractedly. Her father, exceedingly ill at ease himself, and out of his element, did not observe it. The doctor winked at him in his most sagacious manner; but he took no notice. He beckoned to him stealthily; but Sir

Guy, imagining this to be some gesture of woe, had only replied: 'Yes, indeed,' in mournful tones, and shaken his head till his teeth rattled in their golden settings. At last, Gwendoline expressed a wish to see how the dear children were, and departing for the nursery, left the two gentlemen to themselves.

'My dear Sir Guy,' exclaimed the doctor, 'I have been endeavouring to catch your eye for the last ten minutes. I have something very serious and private to tell you, and which I cannot bring myself to speak of in your daughter's presence.' I have just come down from our poor friend yonder'—he pointed to the room above them—'having made a most terrible discovery.' The doctor looked cautiously round, and sank his voice to a whisper: 'Mr Ferrier has died of poison.'

'God bless my soul!' ejaculated the baronet piously.

'Yes, sir; he has taken prussic acid—

by mistake, of course; but it is my duty to send, and at once, to the coroner.'

'The coroner? You don't mean to tell me that you will ask him to hold an inquest at Glen Druid? Why, good Heavens, sir, my son-in-law is not like a miner who dies of fire-damp, that he is to be identified, and investigated, and reported upon. How dare you dream of such a thing?'

It was the first time throughout the long intercourse between these two men that the baronet had ever shown himself in his true colours: the devil of Pride was roused within him, and his manner was haughty and offensive to the last degree.

Dr Gisborne turned pale, but it was certainly not with fear.

'You are doing something, Sir Guy, which I never knew you to do before: you are *forgetting yourself*.'

The sneer was lost upon the baronet in his insolent ire.

‘Forgetting myself! It is you, sir, who are forgetting *yourself*, and also whom you are addressing.

‘Nay, sir! I know him very well; and if the time were fitting, and if it were not that a dead man is lying up-stairs, whose fate is crying aloud for immediate inquiry, I would describe him to you very literally. Do not think to bully *me*, Sir Guy. The meanest miner who ever perished in Glendallack was a better man than you are every way, and could not have been less of a gentleman.’

Sir Guy got up with trembling limbs, and rang the bell. ‘Lord Chillington called you a damned apothecary,’ cried he, ‘and so you are. If I have any authority in this house, you shall be turned out of it this instant.’

‘If you venture to speak one insolent word concerning me before a servant,’ said Dr Gisborne firmly, ‘I will have the police in the house before nightfall.’

When the bell was answered, it was the doctor, and not Sir Guy, who gave his orders.

‘Let William get ready at once to ride to St Medards and take a letter.’—The man bowed and withdrew.—‘You are well advised, Sir Guy, in restraining your temper, or that note would have been written, not to the coroner, but to the superintendent of constabulary. Do not suppose that men like you are above the law. On the contrary, if it were not for the law, they would not even be permitted to exist—to encumber the earth at all. I shall do my duty in this matter, you may be sure, sir, moved by no considerations whatever except those of humanity.’

And with that the doctor marched out of the room, leaving Sir Guy in a piteous state of discomfiture. It was not only that he had got the worst of the encounter, but he had quarrelled—and perhaps irrevocably—with the only medical man who

thoroughly understood his dilapidated constitution.

Although Dr Gisborne had expressed himself, and with truth, as being swayed in the matter of sending to the coroner by his sense of public duty, he was not quite the Brutus that he appeared. He felt quite as keenly as Sir Guy what a misfortune and inconvenience the affair was likely to prove, and especially what an addition it would be to the trouble of the poor widow. For Gwendoline's sake, the doctor would have done anything that was not contrary to his conscience, and, even as matters were, there had been a sharp struggle between him and it. He was the more angry with Sir Guy, both by reason that the objections to having a coroner's inquest at Glen Druid had struck himself also with their full force, and for the moment had almost tempted him to conceal the result of his investigations above-stairs. By the dead man's side he had found a

little table, upon which stood a wine-glass, a carafe of water half full, a bottle of ordinary cough-mixture, and another which had contained prussic acid ; and he had only to lean over those cold lips to know who had emptied that deadly phial. He had not, as we have seen, the heart to communicate such news to Gwendoline herself ; nor did he ever tell her with his own mouth, though, of course, she heard it soon enough from other sources. It was a very different thing to have regaled her with sensational incidents of human life in the abstract, and to enter into these details which had so near and terrible an application to herself. Whoever undertook the task of narration, however, she bore it wonderfully, though none could watch that calm white face, with the cruel twitchings at the corners of the fair mouth, and doubt that she suffered deeply. Even the coroner's jury (for, of course, it came to that) were moved to admiration at Mrs Ferrier's

quiet self-control. Their examination of the servants had elucidated almost everything, but still they were obliged to call her before them. Some would perhaps have spared her the ordeal, if more were curious to see how the beautiful young widow would acquit herself under such circumstances; but the coroner ruled that they must take her evidence. It had already been proved that Mr Ferrier had retired early on the night in question, with injunctions that he should not be disturbed. He had not complained of any illness, except a slight cough; but Billiter—the valet—had noticed how very unwell he looked. He had placed the cough-mixture and the wine-glass upon the table, by his master's orders, but not the other bottle, nor the carafe. When he left Mr Ferrier, there was still a light in the room, but it was not his master's custom when alone to keep a light burning at night.

Billiter was asked no further questions,

for Dr Gisborne's evidence had already explained the presence of the prussic acid. He said that Mr Ferrier had for some time entertained the idea that he had heart-disease, and although he (the witness) considered him quite mistaken—as was now proved without a doubt—he had prescribed for him a drop of prussic acid in a wine-glass of water, whenever he was troubled by the palpitations. In the doctor's distress and trouble upon Gwendoline's account—for he knew that she would have to be called presently—he quite omitted to mention (and indeed to remember) that he had never been consulted by the deceased himself, or that the prescription which had proved so fatal had been written at the instance of Mrs Ferrier. It was evident to all that the invalid had placed the phial of prussic acid by his side after Billiter had left him, and then, perhaps forgetting its presence altogether, had poured out in the dark the contents of the one bottle instead

of the other. It was a most unfortunate and shocking occurrence, but clearly an accident, for which no blame could attach to anybody.

Mrs Ferrier, however, was sent for in her turn. She came in leaning on her father's arm, but not as if she needed any support. Her quiet dignity impressed the assembly, for each was thinking to himself how much it must have cost her to maintain it. Her last act before she entered the room had been, it was said, to embrace Mr Ferrier's children. She was habited, of course, in deep black, and everybody said—which always happened when she wore a new style of dress—that she had never looked so beautiful before. She gave her evidence with clearness, and without a tear, although her voice at times failed her. She produced the last note that her husband had ever written to her. 'MY DEAR GWENDOLINE—I am not very well to-night, and have retired to my

room; *do not let me be disturbed.*' Then she gave much the same testimony concerning the events of the night as had been already given by the maid. 'Unfortunately, I never saw my dear husband after he left the ball-room,' said she, 'or I should have removed the prussic acid; I was quite aware of the dangerous character of those drops. Dr Gisborne gave me due warning of it, and I invariably administered them to Mr Ferrier with my own hands. Upon this occasion, in my absence, he must have taken a dose himself, or placed the phial by his pillow, in case he wished to do so. I can come to no other conclusion than that, in the dark, and when troubled by his cough, he mistook the poison for the mixture.'

That was the opinion at which everybody else, or almost everybody, had arrived already, and a verdict in accordance with it was therefore pronounced by the jury. The single exception was an insig-

nificant one, being no other than Mrs Barland, who, besides, had already showed an ill-feeling towards the principal person concerned. Upon this occasion, however, she manifested no open hostility, but confided her suspicions to her husband only. She insisted—without meeting with much encouragement from the philosophic Samuel to do so—upon reviewing the whole history of the Ferrier family with great gravity of manner, and some tediousness of detail. ‘I have been thinking a deal about it, Samuel, and you mark my words: there has been some—’ she hesitated, for she was prudent even with her prudent spouse—‘some mischief at work, such as it takes two people to hatch.’

‘Two people?’ exclaimed her husband, removing the beloved pipe from his silent lips. ‘Hollo, you *are* a-going it! I thought it was all a-coming round to poor Mrs Ferrier.’

‘*Poor* Mrs Ferrier!’ ejaculated Susan

angrily; 'why, I do believe you are as great a fool as the rest of the men. What is she to be pitied for, I should like to know?'

'Well, to be sure, not much,' rejoined Mr Barland, with an injured air; 'for she's only lost her husband.'

'You know I don't mean *that*, Samuel; only you do annoy me so by defending the woman just because she has a pretty face. Now, do be serious, and listen to me.'

'I have smoked three pipes already, my dear, while you have been talking. I thought you had done, but I can still smoke another.'

'I have only been telling you what has taken place, Samuel; I now want to show you what I make of it.'

'Oh, I see. "The learned judge proceeded to sum up"—and dead against the accused, I'll warrant.'

'Against both the accused, Samuel,'

said Susan gravely ; ‘ for how could Miss Treherne have ever known as my poor mistress was like to die, and that the opportunity would be afforded of her getting into her shoes, if it had not been for Dr Gisborne ? And why did Dr Gisborne conceal what he knew about her health, except that he was persuaded to do it by Miss Treherne ? ’

‘ You are now accusing the most just-minded, as well as the kindest-hearted man in the county, Susan. You have certainly a talent for picking holes in the characters of those who are general favourites.’

‘ What chance has Justice with you men where a pretty woman pleads against her ? ’ answered Susan sharply. ‘ Why, as for the doctor’s kindness of heart—which I don’t deny—that, of course, makes him all the weaker in such a case. No, no, there is something wrong here, Samuel. Perhaps Dr Gisborne deceives

himself as much as anybody in the matter, but he has certainly deceived others. He played false with my dear mistress, and pretended he was doing her good, when he knew her disease was mortal, and no help could avail; and now there has been another deception, and perhaps a worse one. How is it that—so far as I can make out—not a soul ever heard that Mr Ferrier *had* heart-disease except from his wife? You told me you did not think there was much the matter with him yourself; and Billiter, his valet, tells me he never knew as he took drops at all, whereas three bottles have gone up from your own hands to Glen Druid, and for that matter Mrs Ferrier called for them in the carriage herself. Now, how do you account for that, Samuel?’

‘For Mrs Ferrier’s calling in the carriage, or what, my dear?’

‘*You* know what, very well. I ask you, don’t you think it strange that no-

body ever heard of Mr Ferrier's having heart-disease except his wife? Why didn't he ever speak of it himself?'

'Well, Susan, folks are queer in a many ways,' was the sententious reply. 'Moreover'—here he filled his pipe—'they are queerer about illness than anything else. Why, some people lay more store on hiding what is the matter with them—and especially if it is of a sort to take them off sudden—than they do of getting well of it, and that was very like the case with Mr Ferrier.' And with that Mr Samuel Barland rose and yawned, as though he had heard enough of the Ferrier family for that night.

'Perhaps you are right,' said Susan dutifully; but ere the conversation turned to another topic, she muttered to herself, 'and yet I say again, God help my poor lady's children.'

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APT PUPIL

ONE of the first duties which, notwithstanding her distress and trouble, the new-made widow decided to put into effect, was to write to Miss Judith Ferrier, and invite her down to Glen Druid before the funeral. It was, everybody said, a most thoughtful act, and one which did her the utmost credit. It was well known that the relations between her late husband and his sister had not been so amicable as they ought to have been; Gwendoline herself had more than once expressed regret that she could not persuade him to use concili-

atory measures; and now that the time for reconciliation was past, she used the occasion of his death to hold out a friendly hand to this unknown lady. Nothing (everybody said) was certainly now to be gained by it; and from what had been heard of this North British relative, the acquaintanceship could scarcely be desirable in any way. But it was a point of social duty, and Mrs Ferrier was not the one to overlook it. Miss Judith, preceded by a cold and guarded acceptance of her invitation, interlarded with pious phrases, and not without complaints of the manner in which she had been treated by 'poor Bruce,' arrived in due course, and did not belie expectation. A tall and bony virgin of fifty-five, with a turn for criticism upon all subjects save those to which criticism usually confines itself, and a frequent swift expression of disapprobation, was scarcely the sort of guest to mitigate the melancholy that overhung Glen Druid. But it

was not Judith Ferrier's mission to mitigate melancholy, but to improve the occasion, and (if possible) her newly found sister-in-law. She came, of course, with most unfavourable impressions of her, and fully aware of the great need of improvement in which she stood. She had heard nothing but evil of her from her correspondent, Susan Barland, and she had her own opinion (and it was a bad one) of her ill-assorted marriage with 'poor Bruce;' but, on the other hand, there was this invitation—a tardy peace-offering indeed, but still most courteously and respectfully worded, and which, after all, she might reasonably enough, in accordance with her late husband's views, have omitted to send. Moreover, Gwendoline at least compared favourably with that poor, lost Italian woman, Giulia. She was not a foreigner, nor a Papist, and what was quite as important in Judith's eyes, though she would have gone to the stake rather than confess

it, she was the daughter of a real live baronet, now on view (for a limited period) at Glen Druid. The curious inconsistency manifests itself so strongly in what is called the religious world, to bow down before the idol of rank, no matter what very inferior clay its feet may be composed of, was very marked in Judith Ferrier.

There are not many noblemen, nor even baronets, dwelling in Glasgow, and, if the truth must be told, she had never yet sat at the same dinner-table with a person of title. She was a good woman, for all her narrowness of view and conventional virtue; she had an honest and kind heart, and a strong, if at times mistaken, sense of duty. She was really touched at the awfully sudden summons which her brother had received to the Supreme Court on High, and for her part (notwithstanding her complaining letter), she had at once forgiven him all his tres-

pass against her ; but it was a fact that on arriving at that house where he still lay dead, the prominent reflection in her mind was that Sir Guy Treherne of Bedivere Court would that evening take her in to dinner. The children, of course, excited in her considerable interest, although she took it in dudgeon that they bore unmistakable marks of their foreign origin in colouring and complexion. Their hair was dark, and their skin was olive, whereas they ought to have been blondes, as all the Ferriers were. Her own hair, it was true, was no longer golden ; but Art had opposed for her the harsh decrees of Time, and supplied her with an auburn front. In this, and with a breastplate formed of one of the largest cairngorms that her native country ever produced, she did not despair of captivating Sir Guy. The baronet, on his part, did not discourage her, for he understood that for some reason, to him incomprehensible, his

daughter wished to conciliate this female portent, and he set himself to do so accordingly. Never, probably, did two people sit next to one another at the same board with fewer subjects of conversation in common than Miss Judith and himself; but she had come to worship, and he had only to accept the incense with graciousness and gravity. A smile under the circumstances would have been destruction, and yet—for a sense of humour was one of the few virtues he possessed—he had never felt more inclined for mirth; her attire, her accent, and, above all, her adulation of himself, tickled his very heart-strings. He thought of his debts, however, and kept his countenance. Surely Gwendoline would pay them, and especially since he was so strenuously exerting himself to advance her interests; and every now and then he stole an appealing glance at his daughter, to let her know what he was suffering for her sake.

Gwendoline herself, who had no title to Miss Judith's respect, was treated by that inflexible maiden with great sternness. For a whole week she called her 'Mrs Ferrier,' and maintained a reserve as chilling as silence and monosyllables could make it. But at last, as the drop of water wears away the stone, the unvarying respect and deference which her hostess showed her began to thaw her heart, and take the starch out of her manner. It was impossible that wrath should not be turned away by such soft answers as were always given to her. Her opinion concerning the management of the children, and even of the household, was asked, and followed; and even her religious ideas, no matter at what length they were expanded, were listened to with the most exemplary patience. But what was most effective of all was the ready acquiescence which Gwendoline exhibited in her sister-in-law's views with respect to Mr Ferrier's

will. Judith had years ago been very comfortably provided for by her brother, and of course had neither chick (for she lived in the heart of Glasgow) nor child, but still she deeply resented the omission of her name from 'poor Bruce's' testament. 'I did not want his money, my dear' (she had actually said 'my dear' on this occasion); 'but he might have left something, as it must strike even yourself, by way of remembrance to his own kith and kin.'

'My dear Miss Ferrier,' returned Gwendoline, 'I am more pleased than I can say to hear you speak upon this subject, because it shows that you feel quite at your ease with me, as I wish you to do.'

This was a bold stroke, for Judith might have replied with truth that she should have spoken her mind on the matter in question at all events; injustice being a thing she never 'put up with,'

without protest ; but the antagonistic and self-asserting stage was passed, and she only bowed with gravity.

‘ My dear husband left me many costly ornaments,’ continued Mrs Ferrier, ‘ which I value only for his sake. It would be doing me a real favour—although, as respects yourself, it would be but taking your due—if you would select from them such articles as you please.’ And she instantly led the way to her dressing-room, and laid the contents of her jewel-box before the astonished Judith. There was nothing quite so big as the cairngorm, but there was also nothing that was not ten times as valuable. Miss Judith’s eyes glistened ; they had never looked upon such riches before ; she had not even dreamed of such, for her bringing up had been in the strictest sect of the Pharisees, and the *Arabian Nights* had been a book tabooed.

Though her nature was acquisitive, it

was not, however, rapacious, and she took but a moderate share of what was offered to her. Had she taken half, Gwendoline would not have considered it too great a price to pay for her sister-in-law's favour, which by this act she had completely secured. Notwithstanding this, she did not cease to cultivate it. Miss Ferrier had all the attention, so dear to ancient maiden ladies, paid to her by her hostess which respectful solicitude could suggest. Some scheme was every day devised for her amusement, and she was never suffered, by being left alone, to imagine herself neglected. Mrs Ferrier herself, when not engaged with the children, of whom she was laboriously careful, was her constant companion. Nor was this, strange as it may seem, so irksome to Gwendoline as solitude had now become. If not with Judith or in the nursery, she who had once been so self-reliant and independent of society, must now be closeted with her

lawyer, or even exchanging small-talk with her waiting-maid. When perforce left alone, she either drugged herself to sleep with laudanum, or busied herself in writing to Piers.

This latter occupation was not so pleasurable as might, under the circumstances, have been expected. Piers Mostyn had not received the news that she was a free woman with such enthusiasm as he (surely) ought to have done, considering that he was aware how hateful her bondage had been to her. There was even a half-hesitating expression of wonder in his reply, that she could have written so ardently of the future so *very* soon. It was terrible to see her when, locked within her boudoir, she tore open the letter which she imagined would be full of passionate ecstasy, and read those words—her wrath and bitterness broke forth without restraint. ‘Was it for this man, with his meagre conventionalities, that she had

become the 'Thing she had?' Although it was impossible that he could guess *what* she had done, and suffered, he knew that she had suffered, and for his sake, and should have surely sent some acknowledgment of her past, some congratulation on her present—expressed some delight at the prospect of their common future. But he had done none of these things, at all events in the way which she had a right to expect. In her bitter wrath, she even reviled him with such terms as indeed were very fitting, but which were torture to her to have to frame, for she loved this man after her fierce fashion still, and if it was otherwise, there was no drawing back now. She had but him to cling to, and if he failed her—but he would not fail her; she clung to that with the tenacity of despair.

Was it fear, remorse, regret, which fed upon her very vitals, and made her whole existence a nightmare dream? Not any one of them, and yet, perhaps, all of them

—she had only to be left alone to be consumed with vague horrors and forebodings. But in the presence of others she became at once herself, and played her part to admiration. She took no advantage of the privilege of seclusion granted to women in her bereaved condition, but was always at the service of her guest, or ready to attend to household affairs. The golden opinions she had won from all as a wife acquired a new brightness from her behaviour as a widow, nay, as we have seen, her patient conciliation even disarmed her foe, and when Susan Barland gave utterance to some disparaging remark concerning her in the presence of Miss Ferrier, instead of meeting with the sympathy from her patroness and fellow-countrywoman which she had been led to expect, she received a sharp rebuke.

On the other hand, while Gwendoline had thus effected an alliance with one out of the only two persons who might be

called her enemies, she broke with one who, after his fashion, had hitherto been her friend. He had been useful to her in a certain way, but he would no longer be so, and perhaps she was not sorry for the opportunity he himself afforded her of giving him what he would have called his *congé*, and Mr Barland ‘the sack.’

Yearning for the delights of the metropolis, but yet not possessed of a sufficiently long purse to make all its pleasures attainable, Sir Guy resolved to make his first inroad into that exchequer which he fondly hoped (though, truth to say, he was not without his misgivings to the contrary) was to be henceforth a common one between himself and his daughter. She sought his society as she did that of everybody else, and there was therefore no difficulty in finding a fit time to speak. The place happened to be that walk round the Warrior’s Helm, which has already formed the scene of more than one confi-

dential meeting between the personages of our story. The hour was three in the afternoon, when Miss Judith Ferrier had retired, as her custom was, for a siesta; for at Glasgow she had been wont to dine early, and take her 'forty winks,' before she combined recreation and reflection by a walk in the grounds of the cemetery; and at Glen Druid, where the fare was better, she could not resist making the same heavy noonday meal, notwithstanding that she dined again at 7.30. Sir Guy and Gwendoline were therefore quite alone.

'My dear daughter,' said he impressively, but not apropos of anything particular, 'we have both of us had so much to think about of late, and so much to do' (this was a delicate hint at his own exertions to conciliate Miss Ferrier), 'that I have never yet congratulated you upon your present position of wealth and independence. You may imagine, however,

what pride it gives your father to see you yet on the threshold of life in the possession of all that makes life pleasant.'

'Thank you, papa,' said Gwendoline coldly.

'I am not about to remind you, my dear, of what you owe to me, first, because nothing can be owed by a child to her father; and secondly, because I am sure it would be quite unnecessary to put the matter as a *a claim* at all; but the fact is, it would be a great convenience to me if you would let me have a little money to free me from a temporary embarrassment—five hundred pounds, or so, would be amply sufficient for the present.'

'For the present, papa, it might,' was Gwendoline's measured reply. 'But I know you well enough to be aware that, if I gave you this sum, there would be practically no end to such applications; moreover, it would lead to a misunderstanding with respect to our mutual relations, which

you yourself—if you remember—explained to me once in the clearest manner.'

Art had rendered it impossible for the baronet to turn pale, but his dull eyes gleamed with anger, and his hands, which never were quite still, trembled excessively.

'You are welcome to Glen Druid whenever you please to come, papa,' she went on; 'but my banker's book is my private property. You have always taught me how necessary it is to look after one's self, and I have profited by your lessons. You are quite right in saying that I owe you nothing, and in making no claims. You have no claim upon me whatsoever. You left me to shift for myself; I have done so, and I mean to do so now that the shifts are no longer hard.'

Sir Guy, whose feeble legs shook under him with passion, sat down on a slab of rock, and regarded his daughter malignly, without speaking. Gwendoline, on her

part, affected to consider the topic at an end. 'What an ink-black cloud is rising in the west, yonder; there will presently be a storm. Had we not better seek the house?'

'You may go, but I shall not,' returned the baronet hoarsely. 'I will never set foot in your house again, ungrateful, unnatural girl! Is it possible you are my own flesh and blood?'

'This is mere melodrama,' replied Gwendoline harshly; 'a *rôle* you are quite unfit to play, papa. Besides, you are inconsistent. I was not less your flesh and blood, I suppose, when you washed your hands of *me*. Come, come; I think you know me better than to use such arguments; and I am sure, papa, quite sure, that I know *you*.'

It was impossible to imagine a tone more chilling and contemptuous than that in which she spoke, or one more barren of the expectations to which her father looked.

Sir Guy, savage and snubbed, perceived that the affair was hopeless.

‘I have heard of the heartlessness of *speculators*,’ said he with bitter emphasis, ‘but I could not have believed in such conduct as this. Henceforth, it seems, I am to possess no daughter; but ere I leave you, Goneril, let me discharge one last duty—give you one last warning—beware of fortune-hunters, who have not only no claims (such as you deny me), but who will have no scruples.’

‘Thank you, papa,’ said Gwendoline, smiling (she had weighed the possible consequences of his putting his threat of leaving her roof upon the instant into execution, and not perhaps without some passionate reviling spoken to other ears, and had found them serious); ‘and in return for that valuable advice of yours, I will let you have the sum you mention—this once. Perhaps, after all, considering what my London outfit may have cost

you, it is your due. But henceforth, remember, our accounts are balanced ; your acceptance of this money is to be a receipt in full.—It is coming on to rain, papa, as I expected ; let me offer you my arm to the house.’

‘I prefer to walk alone,’ answered Sir Guy gloomily.

And they returned within-doors by separate ways.

CHAPTER IX.

AT LAST.

HOWEVER wise, in a worldly point of view, Gwendoline might be in thus cutting off her relations with Sir Guy, his withdrawal from Glen Druid left her more companionless, and therefore more wretched, even than before. How could the weary, weary time ever be wiled away, till she should once more see Piers Mostyn; have his beloved self to interpose between her and the furies that pursued her! She was frantically eager for his presence, but he was abroad just now, and seemed to her to prolong his stay there needlessly. In one

sense, she was right. He might, of course, have come to England, and even have met her, if he chose. But he felt quite sure of her, and sure of her late husband's money, and he had no wish to be tempted to do anything which might get themselves 'talked about,' and endanger their future position in society. With respect to this sort of forethought, indeed, it seemed that the two had changed places—characters. It was Piers who was all for prudence now: a man has many methods of making the time pass pleasantly which are denied to the other sex; and the reflection that he was enjoying himself, or, at all events, not suffering one tittle of the wretchedness that consumed her, did not tend to console his would-be bride.

To stay at Glen Druid any longer, at last became impossible to her: her life there—dull and yet deceptive—was growing insupportable, while, when not actually playing her part, she was a prey to

nervous terrors. An actress without rest, or even natural sleep! It was insupportable, and she felt that it was driving her mad. She suddenly resolved to move to London: there at least would be amusement, distraction from thought, and mitigation of Miss Ferrier's twaddle. She did not even call in person to thank her neighbours for their 'kind inquiries,' but sent round cards with an inch deep of black edging: it was understood that she was not 'equal' to such an ordeal, and that Dr Gisborne had recommended immediate change of scene. Her now completely won-over sister-in-law was by no means averse to accompany her. She honestly believed that Glasgow was the finest city in the universe, as it most unquestionably was the most pious, but still she was not so prejudiced but that she had some desire to see its rival, London. Moreover, it was a novel and most exquisite sensation to her to travel and be lodged and boarded

at somebody else's expense. The whole party—for, of course, the children were taken by their anxious step-mother—put up at a fashionable hotel in a Mayfair square, which was in itself a rare treat to Judith. She had never stayed at an hotel before; to put one's head into such an establishment had been, in her view of domestic economy, to be half-ruined; to have a meal therein was to 'eat gold.' Of course they were neither so well lodged nor fed—there are not half-a-dozen hotels in London where a good dinner is to be got, unless you measure excellence by price—as at Glen Druid, and the horses and carriages were very inferior; but still the reflection that everything cost a mint of money, and that she had not to pay one shilling of it, filled her with a fearful joy. To do her justice, she had offered to subscribe her share, which she had modestly estimated at thirty-seven shillings and sixpence a week; but Gwendoline had met

this offer with such a dignified refusal, that she never recurred to it again.

Perhaps Mrs Ferrier made more sure of Judith by this little bit of well-judged liberality, than by all those previous efforts at conciliation which had cost her so much. If so, that was her only gain in coming to town ; such grave amusements as she could enter into in correct Judith's company, bored and oppressed her to the last degree. Black Care sat behind her wherever she moved ; and in the midst of London life, she neither lost forgetfulness of the past nor anxiety for the future. What was Piers Mostyn doing ? and why did he still delay to fly to her, even though she was now in town, and out of the reach of prying gossips ? She was quite unaware that the tone of her own letters did much towards keeping him at a distance. Piers was by no means a dull man, and he had much experience of women. He knew of what they are capable, when actuated either by

love or hate ; and in Gwendoline's ardent sentences he detected now and then a certain desperation which alarmed him. If he were to obey her impatient summons, she would as likely as not make a fool of herself. Under the circumstances, she ought not to have the opportunity of being 'demonstrative.' Let her stop for a few months longer with Judy—as he persisted in calling the respectable Miss Ferrier—who seemed a quiet old personage, and very well adapted to take charge of her. Besides the desperation, too, and in curious contrast with it, there was something hard, and almost morose, in Gwendoline's letters, which suggested some enigma to him, though without any hint at its solution ; and Piers did not like enigmas. Upon the whole, he resolved for the present to stop where he was, at Geneva, or, at all events, not to come to London.

But Gwendoline was equally determined that they should meet, and that at

once. By return of post, a letter arrived from Dr Gisborne, in reply to a communication from herself, with a strong recommendation that she should go abroad. There was nothing like a thorough change of scene for one whose nerves had been so terribly tried as hers had been, and the symptoms of which she wrote were exactly those which evidenced that the constitution was suffering from mental causes. Switzerland was as good a place as she could go to. He could not say that it would be any particular benefit to the children; but there was no reason why it should hurt them while the summer lasted. As for the exact locality, they might all go to Lucerne (for instance), and the sooner the better. Before Gwendoline placed this letter in her sister-in-law's hands, she had carefully paved the way for its reception. Instead of keeping her sufferings (which were real enough) to herself, as heretofore, she had let them be seen, and excited Judith's

sympathy. ‘ You can’t be well, my dear,’ Miss Ferrier had observed ; ‘ and I do wish you would consult somebody. It’s no use throwing away your guineas upon London physicians, who don’t understand your constitution ; but sit down at once, and write to Dr Gisborne, who will give you the best advice for nothing at all.’

The good lady, however, little imagined that the prescription would have taken this particular form. She, for her part, was very well content with London ; her simple fancy was easily pleased ; and even to see her name every week in the *Morning Post*, as still resident in the Mayfair square hotel, had an unspeakable charm for her. Moreover, she detested ‘ foreign parts.’ In her eyes, the shadow of Popery darkened more or less every continental nation ; and to venture under it was to be influenced by it in spite of one’s self. To do her justice, she was moved not only by the reflection of the unpleasant change which such apos-

tasy might create in her own prospects for the future; she was 'looked up to' by many faithful people in Glasgow, and any backsliding of hers would have weight with others. If the pope were to make a convert of Judith Ferrier, the blow to Protestantism in that city would be very considerable. He would probably, therefore, spare no effort to accomplish this object; and was it right in her, she argued, to give him the chance? Upon these elevated grounds, she declined, point-blank, to cross the Channel; and Gwendoline, from her inability to rise to the same plane, found it exceedingly difficult to combat them. But she had not gone through so much, since she had become a widow, to conciliate this good lady, and secure her moral support, to be vanquished in this last struggle. She had sheltered herself, thus far under her ægis of respectability; and she could not afford in this, the most dangerous act she had yet

ventured upon, to do without its protection. Her sister-in-law must be carried abroad somehow, and give the sanction of her presence to the meeting between herself and Piers. One would have thought it almost impossible that Judith Ferrier would have been a marketable commodity anywhere, or under any circumstances; and yet, as it so happened, she had become of the greatest possible social value. Her rigid virtue, so far from being only its own reward, was worth at least five hundred pounds in hard cash—and fetched it. Gwendoline was compelled to treat the affair as a matter of business, and at the same time to show the obligation would be on her own side. She painted in glowing colours the advantage which the children, as well as herself, enjoyed from Judith's companionship, and adjured her not to withdraw it. It would be unreasonable, indeed, to expect her to sacrifice herself to others for nothing, and if she (Gwendoline)

went abroad without her, it would be necessary for her to engage, at a large stipend, some other lady as chaperon, so that the money must be spent either way. Why, then, should Miss Ferrier refuse to accept it, and, which was of more moment, shrink from the task of defending her little niece from that insidious foe, Romanism, to the attacks of which her tender age and impressionable nature would be especially exposed? For herself, Gwendoline acknowledged that she was but an indifferent spiritual pastor. Would Judith Ferrier, then, abandon the Lamb to the Wolf, because she feared for her own faith? Gwendoline could never believe that.

Nor were other arguments wanting of considerable power of a heterogeneous kind. The five hundred pound cheque was, as we have hinted, not without its influence, especially as, so far from being considered as a bribe, it was only an inadequate requital for services to be rendered.

The sea-passage would be taken on a fine day, and between the nearest opposite points of the Channel. They were to stay nowhere where there was not a Lutheran chapel, or, at all events, a Protestant service, upon the Sabbath; and she, Miss Ferrier, was never to be asked to join in promiscuous bathing. Among the information concerning foreign parts of which she had possessed herself, was the fact, that there were no locks to the chamber-doors in foreign parts; and a portion of the five hundred pounds was, in consequence, invested in a door-fastener of gigantic size and subtle workmanship, which subsequently excited no little suspicion when the luggage came to be examined by the French authorities.

It is one of the smaller penalties which egotists have to pay, that not only does it soon destroy the sense of humour, but after a while we lose even the pleasure derived from cynicism; otherwise, Gwendoline

could not but have been amused with the opinions and observations of her travelling companion. That lady may have been mistaken in her views of politics, when she wished to know why the arms of England had not been turned to the useful purpose of compelling foreign nations to learn and speak our language; but her remarks upon the table-d'hôte *potages*, 'rags of meat floating in melted butter and water,' and on the *rôtis*, were really worthy of preservation. 'How was it,' said she, 'that though they saw in the flesh what seemed to have been boiled for soups, they never saw the soups that those rags must at some remote period have made?' At first, indeed, through disgust at these plainer dishes, and avoidance of the *entrées*, through fear of there being a frog in them, Miss Ferrier confined her eating to bread at discretion, and even with this precaution she did not preserve herself from the frightful experience of partaking of an aniseed

cake at the Verviers Railway Station, the memory of which, if not the actual taste of it, remained with her to her dying day. At the Prussian frontier, when they inquired if she had 'anything to declare,' it was with difficulty that she could be restrained from stating her various grievances; while her passport—without which she imagined herself to be liable to the fate of Baron Trenck or Silvio Pellico—was on no occasion extracted from her save at the point of the bayonet. Then, after each day of alien oppression and stubborn resistance, to hear her comments on the comfortless plan of the bed-chambers, on the little slop-basins, in which she was expected to wash, and on the table-napkins with cotton balls all round them, which served for towels, would have moved Memnon to smiles. But for Gwendoline there was no such innocent mirth; no distraction from thought in change of scene or of people; no pleasure, no rest. The Rhine itself was

but another and more tedious means of travel than the railway. Her gaze rested upon castle and tower, on road and river, on forest and vineyard, with the same absent air; her inward eye only beheld one object for which she pined. She had neither regret nor remorse—to be so called—but she felt that until that object was arrived at she should be wretched. She was, however, getting very near it now. They had taken up their abode at Lucerne, and Piers Mostyn was no farther off than Geneva.

The party were very welcome at the *Schweizer Hof*, although it was the height of the season. They had taken the best rooms that were to be got, and it was understood that they were to reside for a considerable time. Gwendoline and Miss Ferrier did not, however, dine in their own apartments, but at the table-d'hôte; and all who patronized it soon began to rave about the young Englishwoman, so

beautiful and so rich, who was reported to be such an exemplary step-mother, and was certainly the most quiet and sedate of widows who ever—for some unexplained reason—found it impossible to live at home. Without gossip, even Swiss scenery palls upon polite society—besides that, upon wet days, one has really nothing else to fall back upon—and a favourite topic of conversation among the English portion of the frequenters of the table-d'hôte was the high play and reckless libertinism of the Honourable Piers Mostyn, who, it seemed, had acquired quite a continental reputation in that way. The news did not greatly disturb Gwendoline. In the first place, since she knew his character so thoroughly, she was quite prepared for such intelligence; and secondly, she reflected that the more dissolutely he lived, the more he would be in want of money, and the sooner he would therefore be necessitated to apply to the sole

source whence he could now obtain it.

On the receipt of Gwendoline's first summons from Lucerne, however, Piers made up his mind to obey it; but he sent before him a letter full of such advice as made her pale cheek flush. She was adjured to receive him—if their meeting should take place, as it was very likely to do, in public—with quiet coldness, and to evince a careless surprise, as though the *rencontre* had been quite unpremeditated. It was all important, he urged, as respected their future position, that they should be prudent now, and especially on such an occasion. The idea of being schooled as to social behaviour by any human being—much more by a roué and gambler such as Piers—would, a few months back, have made her lip curl with bitterest contempt. But it was not so now. It did not even yet occur to her that the passionate tone of her own letters had made her lover doubtful of her self-command; but what

was worse, she felt that his warning was not needless. She was no longer the woman of three years ago, who had dismissed him from her side notwithstanding his fond entreaties, to execute a far-sighted scheme that in the end should bring them nearer. The scheme had succeeded, and she was greedy to pluck the fruit of it. For three long years she had played the hypocrite, and she eagerly longed (as though it had been possible!) to be once more herself again; for three long years she had worn the fetters of convention, and she ardently yearned to enjoy her freedom with him, for whose sake she had become a slave. No new plighted innocent girl ever awaited the coming of her beloved one with so intense a desire as was consuming *her*. Every day, every hour of enforced deceit increased it: she had earned her wages—none knew save herself by what toil and trouble, none guessed by what remorse and despair, and her heart

urgently demanded payment at once and in full. Long habit of dissimulation had made her part with others easy enough to play; but she mistrusted her own powers in the presence of him for whose sake she had abandoned nature for the stage.

This woman, too, whose countenance she had at so great a sacrifice secured, would be a spectator only too likely to be critical, and perhaps even suspicious. Piers was already on his way—he had preferred to make the journey on foot, perhaps, as she bitterly thought, for the very purpose of delay, and might now come across them at any moment—in their drives, their walks, their boating excursions, abroad or within-doors. Would it be possible to receive him as she had once so easily made up her mind to do, in that seemingly so far back time, when it was he who was rash, and she who was prudent? When any new object of beauty or of interest was pointed out to her, as

among those fair scenes it often was, even by her unimpulsive companion, she flushed and started, notwithstanding all her efforts at self-control. The reflection that Miss Ferrier had not so much as known of Piers Mostyn's existence a week ago, and could certainly not identify him as her lover, was useless to restrain her. As lake, and forest, and mountain were nothing to *her*, who only looked for Piers, so she thought it must be with others.

At last the long-looked-for meeting took place, and, as generally happens in such cases, under circumstances quite unexpected. They were taking their places at the table-d'hôte as usual, when Miss Ferrier whispered to her: 'What a very handsome young man that is, my dear, who has just come in!'

Gwendoline looked up toward the doorway of the *salle à manger*, carelessly enough, and there stood Piers.

CHAPTER X.

MISS FERRIER'S DAVID.

CONTRARY to her own expectations, and in excess of her hope, Gwendoline was fully equal to the occasion. She did not, indeed, venture to meet Piers Mostyn's glance, as, after roving from face to face down the long line of table-guests, it settled, with a gleam of rapturous delight (for her beauty, which had increased rather than diminished, fairly took him by storm), upon her own; but she maintained a calm demeanour; and when Miss Ferrier whispered: 'Who is it, Gwendoline? He seems to know us and is coming this

way ;' she answered quietly : ' I do know him slightly. It is Mr Piers Mostyn.'

' What ! that brother of Lord Luttrell's that one has heard such shocking things about ?'

' Hush ! Yes.'

Next moment he was at their side ; she introduced him with grave politeness to her sister-in-law, and he took his chair between them. Gwendoline's heart beat so fast, and so loud, that she almost wondered people did not turn round and ask what clock was ticking ; but she looked straight before her without moving a muscle, and listened to him with great sedateness. As an old acquaintance, he, in the first place, naturally addressed her rather than her companion ; but after a phrase or two of polite sympathy upon her recent bereavement, and an inquiry after Sir Guy's health, he divided his attentions pretty equally between the two ladies. His endeavours were, however, mainly directed

to conciliating 'Judy,' and in this he succeeded to admiration.

It is a peculiarity of elderly and pious ladies of all ranks, that while sufficiently severe upon the frailties of the youth of their own sex, they are very merciful to the 'follies' of young men. They persist in looking upon them severally as victims to the wiles of 'designing hussies,' while they pity them individually in direct proportion to their good looks. Again, when these ancient females are of the middle rank, they are wont, notwithstanding their own high standard of morals, to grant considerable latitude to men of good birth and position. 'We must remember,' they say, 'to how many temptations they are exposed' (a remark which they never dream of applying to the 'poor hussies'); and though they do not quite confess as much even to themselves, they have a vague notion that young gentlemen of title have a sort of right divine to mis-

behave themselves in the matter of gallantry. Perhaps even this very reputation for 'naughtiness' is not without a certain attraction for them, or perhaps it is with the pious wish of converting these exalted young evil-doers; but for whatever reason, certain it is that the class in question do 'cotton' to young roués of the aristocracy, whenever they get the chance, in a very remarkable manner; and Miss Judith Ferrier was no exception to the rule. It naturally flattered her self-love that this handsome and agreeable young fellow, own brother to a noble lord, should so evidently do his best to make himself pleasant to her, and especially that the beautiful Gwendoline did not (as was but too usual with the cavaliers of the table-d'hôte) exclusively monopolize his attention. His reputation for high play was indeed a much more serious matter in her eyes than his other failings; she 'looked on gamblin' and all sic things as you lose

money by' with the abhorrence peculiar to her nation; but, on the other hand, it was sad to think how, concerning the peccadilloes of great people, folks were given to lying; and she charitably hoped that the scandal about him in this matter was grossly exaggerated.

Piers had of course been to Scotland, as a guest in many of the mansions of the north, to which she had been accustomed to look up as to the dwelling of the gods upon Olympus; and he had also been to Glasgow, which (he said) he admired prodigiously. Before the table-d'hôte was over, in fact, you would have thought—to watch the faces of the two ladies—that it was the ancient spinster rather than the fair widow who was enamoured of the Honourable Piers Mostyn; and it was positively upon her invitation, and not upon Gwendoline's, that he subsequently partook of coffee in their own apartment.

Absence may possibly make some

hearts grow fonder, but we are much inclined to question that being its general effect, and, at all events, such was not the case with Piers. He had not forgotten Gwendoline, of course; but when separated from her, he had solaced himself with the charms of others, and could have undoubtedly lived without her very comfortably—if he had possessed the means—to his life's end. He had an idea, too, that all this trouble and bother about 'old Ferrier's' death would have had its effect upon her appearance; that widow's weeds would not have become her; and that altogether she would have 'fallen off' in her looks. But now that he had found her more beautiful than ever, he was once more at her feet, not, indeed, in the sense of being fascinated, or a captive, but as a willing and even eager lover. He was agreeably surprised and greatly pleased with Gwendoline, just as one is wont to value a possession about which one has

been suspicious, but which turns out to be quite a bargain. The alternation of passion and cynicism in her moods was to his liking (for he had long lost all taste for simplicity in women), and instead of having (as he had apprehended) to feign his raptures, he almost fell in love with her for the second time.

On the first occasion when they met alone, their greeting was, in fact, equally warm on both sides. 'What a happy moment is this!' cried he, embracing her; 'there is nothing for us to fear now; all obstacles are surmounted, and that so soon and easily.'

The assent was long in coming, but it came at last. 'Yes, dearest.'

Judy, who had grown audacious with respect to Swiss *entrées*, and in the praiseworthy attempt to get her money's worth out of the table-d'hôte on the previous day, had eaten more freely than was good for her, was fortunately confined to her own

room ; so the two lovers were left to themselves. They had not been alone together since the night of their parting at Bedivere Court ; and the incidents of that occasion naturally occurred to them. He reminded her, smiling, of how she had then said that there was one thing the test of which not even her love could have stood, namely, poverty, and inquired was she of the same opinion still.

‘Yes, Piers,’ said she firmly. ‘Are not you?’

‘Well, yes,’ said he. ‘Of course I did not like your marrying old Ferrier, though I felt you were right all along. But that’s all over now, my dear ; and we shall be extremely jolly. We have got a great prize, and, upon the whole, we have not paid a great price for it.’

She was silent, and scarce dared to offer him her cheek to kiss, in lieu of answer, lest he should notice how deadly cold it was. Notwithstanding that his

arm was wound lovingly about her, her blood seemed to stagnate. 'Not a great price. Good God!' She used this ejaculation quite mechanically; yet it sent a chill through her anew. Suppose there was a good God after all? 'Not a great price. If this man only knew what the price had been!'

'I like your friend Mr Mostyn,' said Miss Ferrier frankly, as she and Gwendoline sat together over their breakfast a few days afterwards.

'My friend!—nay, I should rather say *your* friend,' replied her sister-in-law archly. 'I am sure he pays much more attention to you than he does to me. You will get quite talked about, you two!'

The idea of being 'talked about' in connection with the Honourable Piers Mostyn was rather agreeable to Miss Judith; and not by any means merely ludicrous, as it appeared to Gwendoline.

She patted the young widow's hand reprovingly, and said : ' O fie ! '

But Gwendoline had a reason of her own for keeping the conversation to this channel. The period had now arrived when Miss Ferrier's moral support was become more than ever necessary to her, and she was determined to obtain it on the first opportunity. When she and Piers were once married, she could dispense with the old lady's assistance easily enough, and fully intended to do so ; but to gain her consent to that union was of the utmost importance. Who could ever say a word against it, if her late husband's sister, and only relative, was in its favour ? and she did not despair of gaining her good word. ' Mr Mostyn has been " talked about " enough already,' continued Gwendoline musingly ; ' I wonder whether he is as black as he is painted ? '

' That I am quite sure he is not,' said

Miss Ferrier positively. 'There cannot be any very great harm in a young man who goes out of his way so (as he *does*) to make himself agreeable to a person of my years—almost old enough to be his mother.'

It passed through Gwendoline's mind that, so far as years went, Judith Ferrier might have been Piers Mostyn's grandmother, without any great violation of the laws of nature; but she did not give expression to that idea. 'He is certainly very polite,' said she assentingly; 'but I have been told by papa, who knows the world very thoroughly, that it is always those men who are most courteous and respectful to our sex in manner and demeanour, that are the most heartless in their near relations with them.'

'I can never believe that Mr Mostyn is heartless,' observed Judith softly. There was an unaccustomed pathos in Miss Ferrier's tone that did not escape her

observant companion ; and Gwendoline remained silent, to let the other's feelings have full play.

‘He reminds me—though, again, in some things he is so different,’ sighed her sister-in-law, ‘of one that—’ She paused, put her handkerchief to her eyes, and shook her head.

‘Of one that is gone?’ suggested Gwendoline sympathizingly.

‘Yes, gone from me, though he is not dead, my dear. It is getting to be near half a century ago, and yet I remember it as if it were yesterday. He was a most respectable young man, and had a very thriving commercial establishment. He did a great deal of business with foreign parts ; that was one of the reasons why I was so set against visiting them.’

Miss Judith's sensibility had invested the bare circumstance that her early suitor had kept an Italian warehouse with this amazing halo ; but her present tenderness

of reminiscence was perfectly genuine. Half a century ago or so, when she had been by no means an unattractive-looking lassie, she had been wooed by a Glasgow youth, named David Penrose, of whose personal appearance—the photograph of which had never faded from her virgin mind—Piers Mostyn reminded her. They were not probably much alike in other respects; and we may safely say (if there is any confidence to be placed in averages) that David was worth ten of him. But yet he had played poor Judy false; had ‘thrown her over’ (if we may use such a phrase with delicacy), in favour of one Jennie Kerr, who was better dowered than the then portionless Judith. But she had forgiven him that by this time, though she had not forgiven Jennie; and all her memories of that far back spring-tide were kindly and tender. Had that little matter come off more satisfactorily, Judith would have been doubtless a different woman.

Our temperaments, as well as our religious convictions, are in a great measure the result of circumstances; and she was not by nature sour, nor had she been born a Calvinist. Her hard features seemed to soften as she spoke of those early days; her harsh voice grew almost musical, her eyes filled with tender tears—the genuine dew of the morning of life.

Gwendoline's heart was not one that could be touched by such a spectacle; but she thoroughly understood the situation, and hastened at once to profit by it. 'Dear Miss Ferrier,' said she, 'your words affect me more than I can express. I feel for you—believe me—deeply; as, indeed, I have reason to feel; for when I married your poor brother, I—he—he was not the man of my own choice.'

Miss Ferrier laid down the work on which her trembling fingers had affected to be engaged, with a look of unaffected surprise, for in all Mrs Barland's aspersions

against Gwendoline's character, she had never hinted at this. 'Why, you don't say so, my dear; and yet you made Bruce such an excellent wife!'

'I did my best in that respect,' said Gwendoline simply; 'but I loved another when I married him. It was not my fault; I obeyed my father. He whom I would have married was as poor as myself, and our engagement papa said was out of the question.'

'That was just what happened with Davy,' sighed Miss Ferrier. 'It was the money did it. He thought Jennie Kerr a better match—though he was wrong even there, as it turned out. But go on, my dear, and tell me about yourself. Is the young man still alive that would have married you?'

'Yes.'

'And unmarried?'

'Yes. It was Piers himself.'

'What! the Honourable Piers Mos-

tyn !' exclaimed the astonished Judith—
'the only brother of Lord Luttrell ?'

It had instantly occurred to her (as Gwendoline had hoped it would), that although she could not marry Piers herself, it would be a great feather in her social cap to be sister-in-law to the woman who did. 'Why, if that brother of his should die, she, Judith Ferrier, could be almost said to be connected with the peerage itself !' It was anomalous enough that this pious old lady, who so often expressed her satisfaction that she had only a few more years to live among the pomps and vanities of a wicked world, should have derived satisfaction from this consideration ; yet it is not only a fact that she did so, but also that she had never been so thoroughly pleased with her future prospects since the day when false young David promised to make her Mrs Penrose. 'Lor, my dear, and what do you mean to do now ?' inquired she with extreme interest.

‘Well, that is a matter which in due course of time—certainly not to-day, or to-morrow,’ returned Gwendoline gravely, ‘concerning which I had thought of asking your valuable advice. Since you yourself have touched upon the subject—though I feel there is a delicacy in speaking of it so comparatively soon after your dear brother’s death—I will say this much, that if at some future period I could be induced to consider Mr Mostyn’s suit with favour, it would be mainly from the reflection that the dear children would have some one else to look to than their step-mother, in yourself. Otherwise, nothing could induce me to think of a second marriage. Though, as to that, I am sure Piers would be a most kind father; for, whatever his shortcomings, he is certainly tender-hearted.’

‘He is that, I am sure,’ assented Judith rapturously.

‘Well, what I had vaguely thought

about, dear Miss Ferrier—for all these things are in the future, and but for this unexpected meeting with Mr Mostyn, might never have taken any tangible shape—was this; that in case I was ever induced to marry Piers, that I might intrust dear Marion, with, of course, a suitable provision for her maintenance, to your care. The bracing Scotch air is in a manner native to her, and Dr Gisborne himself once mentioned it as likely to do her good.'

'That would be a capital plan,' said Miss Ferrier eagerly. The old lady was genuinely attached to little Marion, who she averred was 'quite a companion to anybody' by this time. The idea of a liberal allowance per annum for her keep (although, to do her justice, quite a secondary consideration), was also not displeasing.

'Then supposing, just for the sake of argument,' continued Gwendoline, 'that if some time hence the event of which we

have been speaking should be hinted at by Mr Mostyn, I may consider the question without reference to dear Marion ?'

'I should like to have the darling child to live with me above all things,' said Miss Ferrier gratefully ; and for that time the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MARRIAGE GIFT.

It is a moot-point, and must ever be so among good people like ourselves, how far wicked folks are able to enjoy themselves; it seems, however, that they do continue to do so in some degree. The professional thief (for instance) has his hours of relaxation, and doubtless of pleasure, when in company of the (temporary) object of his affection, or over the jovial bowl, he is oblivious to the existence of the police. Conscience has not power at all times, although, perhaps, its sting may return with the more virulence, after

such brief intervals of impunity. Thus, the moral support of Miss Ferrier having been secured, Gwendoline gave herself up, if not to happiness, at all events to the hopes of it, and resolutely stifled all misgivings. She lived in the smiles of her lover whenever it was possible; and when alone—and she was never alone in the daytime, for the company of her sister-in-law, or even her step-children, was far preferable to her own—she took her laudanum in increased doses. Piers continued assiduously attentive to ‘Judy,’ and devoted to herself; and if he had now and then very particular business which took him to Hombourg or Baden, he always returned more submissive than ever, and grievously in want of money, with which Gwendoline supplied him without stint.

The whole party remained at Lucerne far into the winter; and when exactly one year had elapsed since Mr Ferrier's death, returned to Paris, where Piers and

Gwendoline were married at the British Embassy, Miss Ferrier and the children departing the same day for Glen Druid. Fortune, which would thus seem to have filled Gwendoline's cup to the brim, had still another gift in store for her, which, curiously enough, was presented on her wedding-day. The bride and bridegroom were at dinner when an express messenger arrived from London seeking speech with Mr Mostyn. He left the table, and was for some time absent. Gwendoline grew fidgety and disturbed; was it possible that even now, in that first hour of success, Nemesis was coming upon her? Her secret was safe enough, save in her own nervous imagination; but in that it was never safe. What event, thought she, in England could possibly have happened of such importance as to necessitate a special messenger? Conscience does not reason, or she would have reflected, that if it had had anything to do with her own

affairs, the man would not have been sent to Piers. At last her husband returned, wearing some gravity in his face, but more of triumph. 'Gwendoline,' said he, taking her hand, 'my brother has been killed by a fall from his horse. I salute you,' and he kissed her cheek, 'as Lady Luttrell.'

If there was not much fraternal sentiment in his words, there was as much as could be reasonably expected. There had never been 'any love lost,' as the phrase goes, between himself and his brother, and he was not the man to trouble himself to affect a virtue without some solid reasons; but in the ordinary and conventional sense of the term, Piers Mostyn was a gentleman, and good manners, if nothing more, prevented him from evincing any vulgar satisfaction. It was not so, however, with Gwendoline. Relieved from her vague fears, wild with excitement, and for once thrown off her guard, she ex-

claimed : ‘How lucky it was we did not hear of this good news yesterday, or our marriage must needs have been put off!’

The unseemliness of the remark, rather than its calculating selfishness, jarred upon the not over-sensitive ear of the new-made lord. ‘Yes, that *was* fortunate,’ replied he coolly ; ‘and there is another pleasant consideration, I come into my kingdom, such as it is ; so no one can now say that the luck is *all* upon my side.’

It is not a good augury for the future when folks upon their wedding-day begin to balance their respective advantages and obligations.

THE REAPING.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST CROP.

FIVE years have passed away, bringing their changes to the characters of this history as they are more or less capable of change. Lord Luttrell is not much altered, and Gwendoline still less so, except as far as her personal beauty is concerned, which has not diminished, but has entered on another phase—for she is a mother. Her only child, the Honourable Spencer Mestyn, is now four years old; a splendid little fellow, who has inherited the good looks of both his parents, and, let us hope,

not their vices. His father's interest in him—since there is no entail for him to cut off in his favour—is very faint. Epsom and Newmarket, with whist so short and sharp that one may lose hundreds of pounds in an hour at it, absorb my Lord's intellectual energies; while his social occupation is the pursuit (by no means under difficulties) of the fair sex. But dark-eyed Spencer is the darling of his mother, who is devoted to him; of Dr Gisborne, now an old and broken man, with no fire left save a mild glow of tenderness; and of all who know his fair frank face and winning ways. Miss Ferrier dotes upon him, and Marion and Eady are never so happy as when it is their task to amuse him; but they are not much thrown together. The two girls are a good deal with their aunt in Scotland, and visit their own home only at intervals.

Sir Guy is dead, and Bedivere Court is in the hands of Mr Aaron Melchisadeck,

the money-lender, of whom the county hears with horror that since he cannot sell it at the sum the keen old baronet persuaded him to advance, he is going to live there himself. Lord Luttrell alone expresses it as his opinion that it would be a deuced convenient thing if he did.

Gwendoline administers the property of her step-children with tolerable fairness. Glen Druid is kept up as it should be, or, at all events, it has the air of being so when they and their aunt visit it; but of course there is a large surplus out of the funds left for their maintenance and education, and all this finds its way into my Lord's pocket, the seams of which have unhappily become unsown; it has no bottom to it whatever. Up to this time, Gwendoline has assisted him to the utmost of her means, but she is not wholly wrapt up in her husband now; her child's interests have also to be considered. Of those two she is still fond—though with an ever

widening difference in Spencer's favour—and also, to all appearance, of her step-children; but to the rest of the world she is hard and cold. She wears her mask no longer so closely or so continuously as heretofore, for it is not now worth her while; and Miss Ferrier has in consequence quite lost her illusions with respect to her sister-in-law; but the boy is a common tie between them still.

Supposing, indeed, it is the fact that all the world are born bad, little Spencer is the exception that is necessary to prove the rule; or if that suggestion is unorthodox, let us suppose his two parents were the two negatives that have made him an affirmative of goodness. He would be an angel but for the possession of what his father calls 'a devil of a temper,' but which is, in fact, nothing more than a determination to stand by his rights, and (what is much rarer) by the rights of other people. He possesses a sense of justice so impartial

as to be quite alarming and revolutionary. The idea which his mother secretly entertains, that Marion and Eady have got his property, and ought to be ashamed of growing up co-heiresses, has never entered his mind, nor does she ever venture to hint it to him. He has not inherited her dislike to honest Susan. He will have no one unjustly treated or misused, if he knows it, down to his sober bay pony. The only cloud upon his bright young life is that he cannot quite bring himself to love papa.

We have said that Gwendoline no longer troubled herself to deceive even Miss Ferrier, but in one respect she did endeavour to do so. Womanly pride impelled her to still strive to conceal from her that she was not quite so happy in her second marriage as she had expected to be. In this she failed ; but, on the other hand, her sister-in-law did not fathom the fact that she was supremely wretched. The knowledge of her husband's unfaithfulness

had come to her long ago—very soon, indeed, after their marriage ; but time, while it widened that knowledge, did not heal her wounded spirit. Jealousy consumed her now, as love had done aforetime. Such delinquencies a wife may forgive, even again and again ; but the forgiveness must be sought, and Lord Luttrell never dreamed of seeking it. On the first occasion of suspicion, there had been a very unedifying scene between them. Piers was too ‘refined’ to laugh in a lady’s face, but he had expressed himself with brutal candour. He designated her scruples as ‘utter nonsense,’ and only adapted for the daughter of some small tradesman : her alliance with the Ferrier ‘lot’ had forsooth made her quite ‘respectable.’ Such arguments, he would have her to know, were quite out of place addressed by a woman of position to her husband. When she endeavoured to combat this view, he grew more audacious still, and passed from the general

to the particular. Even if, as she represented, good society had any distinct code of morals, *he*, at all events, could not be expected to be bound by it. To suit her plans, he had remained a bachelor; but, now that he was married, he would no longer be her slave. He considered that old compact between them to be a quit-tance of all obligations between them beyond their mutual convenience. To be plain, they were both adventurers, who, with a common stake, had played a great game, and won it; but as to sentiment, there was nothing of that sort at all in the transaction. He would flirt just as much as he pleased.

With that curt expression of his intentions, Lord Luttrell had turned upon his heel and left her, and he had kept his word respecting them. At first, Gwendoline strove to appear contemptuously indifferent to her husband's profligacy; but the only effect of that was to afford him great

relief. Then she endeavoured to make him jealous by her own course of conduct, in which she totally failed, for two reasons. *Imprimis*, though not without passion, her affections, like those of most of her sex, were personal. She did not care for men, but only for one man ; and it was difficult for her, actress though she was, even to feign otherwise. Secondly, when she had done so, and looked for an outbreak from her husband, it came only in a peal of laughter. ‘My dear Lady Luttrell,’ said he (for he was as polite to her in private as in public), ‘you amuse me immensely ; when you think to make me jealous, however, you are imputing to me an injustice. Above all things, I wish to be fair ; and when I demanded for myself the most perfect freedom, I did not intend tyrannically to deny it to my wife.’

This insolent indifference wounded her more than all her wrongs. It was a cynicism that she was totally unprepared for,

and against which there was no contending. Above all, she was for ever haunted with the sense of the tremendous *unknown* price which she had paid to gain this man, who had so soon grown weary of her. She could not help expecting him, although it *was* unknown, to take it into account. Neither repentance nor remorse, but a dull resentful rage, took possession of her when she reflected upon this. Had she endowed him with money, obtained by such means as *that*, for him to make her wretched? For she was at once the minister and the victim to his profligacy. She had heard of a place of future punishment reserved for those who did such deeds as she had done, but she believed in it now less than ever, for was she not receiving her punishment already at the hands of this ungrateful, iron-hearted man? Then she would remind herself of her folly in crediting him with the knowledge of the sacrifice she

had made of mental peace, and even of the material rest such as the meanest creature enjoyed, for his dear sake, and then once more would upbraid him again. It was only by degrees that she had been driven to these bitter communings with her own heart. She had not spared to express her reproaches; she had even condescended to appeal to his pity. Scenes of violence, of scorn, of reckless recrimination, and also of passionate entreaty, had taken place between them before it had come to this pass, and all this, it must be remembered, while the pair were outwardly upon good terms with one another, in the smooth respectable round of county life, or among the clamorous vanities of the town. She bore the wretchedness of her lot bravely enough before the world, just as in the river-bed some riven-breasted rock stands with its noble head above the sparkling foam. If she could not win *his* pity, she

would have no others'. She was still an object of admiration to all who saw her, and of envy to not a few who thought they knew her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECOND GENERATION.

THE years roll on ; and save for one bright spot—her boy, who is now at Eton—Gwendoline's firmament is darker than ever. The domestic life of the Luttrels has begun to be commented upon : it is notorious that his Lordship is the slave of a certain female leader of fashion, and her Ladyship must therefore needs receive her share of the world's intolerable pity. They are at their town-house ; and though Gwendoline's 'at-homes' are numerous, the word home is a sad misnomer. Her husband and herself are but rarely seen

together in public, and never meet alone save on momentous occasions. One of these had just arisen. It is more serious than the usual applications for money which now alone cause Lord Luttrell to seek the presence of his wife : it is a letter from poor terrified Miss Ferrier, telling of Marion's serious illness, followed by a telegram announcing her death. A touching circumstance attends it. On the morning *after* the receipt of the last message comes a note from the now dead girl—such miracles can science now perform—begging Gwendoline not to be alarmed ; expressing her (the writer's) belief that she is not really so ill as her aunt believes her to be, and begging that her dear step-mother may not be induced to leave London, where she is doubtless enjoying herself so much, upon her account. Thoughtful for others to the last, the poor girl seemed to speak kindness from the very tomb. Gwendoline had no tears to shed, but she was

not a little moved by this. Perhaps her long pretended affection for this short-lived fragile creature had turned to genuine regard ; or perhaps the thought that one out of the only two persons of her own sex who really loved her, and upon whose good offices she could count, was gone for ever, produced some selfish sense of desolation ; or perhaps (for all that affected her boy affected her) she knew that Spencer would weep to hear such news. But, at all events, she regretted Marion's death. To Lord Luttrell the affair presented another aspect. The leader of fashion had snubbed him for a day or two, and he was not so polite as usual to his wife in consequence.

‘ Well,’ said he petulantly, ‘ I hope the other one's life is a better one, or I shall have made a bad bargain after all.’

The remark, under the circumstances, was sufficiently brutal in itself ; but the misfortune of the possession of good man-

ners in those who are mere scoundrels at bottom is that, when the polish *does* rub off, the true substance appears all the more objectionable. A King Charles' spaniel with the mange is one of the most unpleasing spectacles. It struck Gwendoline for the first time that she had married a ruffian. For the first time also she found herself thinking moodily of the old man who had loved her so dearly, and had made provision for her against this very contingency which had just happened, so that her circumstances were none the worse for it. From his lips there had never fallen one severe word, far less a selfish or a cruel one; and yet she did not deceive herself even now: she well remembered that she had always hated him, and had shuddered with a deadlier chill on the day she married than even on that terrible morning when she saw him lying white and dead. But this reflection did not soften her towards Piers. Henceforth,

she resolutely determined to try another plan with him; and the next time she saw him in private—upon a matter of finance—she put it into execution. It was one of those periods at which she received the sum for the maintenance of her step-children—now reduced to one—and he had come according to custom to draw his lion's share of the spoil.

‘No, Luttrell,’ answered she to his application (he was no longer ‘Piers’ with her now); ‘this money is not mine to give. It was not intended to be spent upon me; certainly not upon you, and least of all upon those on whom you would squander it. You shall no longer have one penny of it—unless you mend your ways.’

It was curious that though her sense of his abuse of the gift in question had been so keen, she had never before thought of this obvious method of reprisal, which had been always in her power, since the allow-

ance could only be obtained by her own signature. Perhaps her pride had refused to hint at how the money was spent; perhaps it had not stooped to so commonplace a revenge; but at all events so it was.

‘Oh,’ replied he with a cold sneer, ‘that is your plan, is it? You have failed to carry the citadel by assault; so now you mean to starve out the garrison.’

‘I mean to try,’ said Gwendoline grimly.

‘Very good, madam;’ and it seemed strange to her how that handsome face of his could wear such an ugly look: ‘we shall see. Hitherto, if I have pleased myself, I have done so with some discretion, and with a due regard to your position as my wife.’

‘You have been most considerate, I am sure,’ said she; and her look of cold contempt was more scornful even than her words.

‘You fool,’ cried he in a fury, ‘you

don't know whom you are defying. I have some popularity, madam, and a good deal would be forgiven me in way of what you call "outrage;" but I shall test the charity of our friends to the utmost. I will do such things as shall make you blush through your rouge. Because you are not liked, you fancy, forsooth, that you are respected! Well, I will so insult you before society—before the world—that respect for you shall be no longer possible, but must needs give place to contemptuous pity.'

He saw her shudder, in spite of all her efforts to remain unmoved.

'Yes,' sneered he; 'you have, unfortunately for yourself, a certain foolish pride, which makes you quite unfit to contend with one like me, who have no such weakness. Since you are thus weighted, the struggle, believe me, is unequal. Be warned in time; you will not only be beaten, but you will suffer in the contest

itself. Your challenge is as idle (if you will forgive me the ungallantry of the metaphor) as though one of our old crazy wooden ships should pit herself against an ironclad.'

'You are indeed as the thing to which you liken yourself, sir; and not only impervious as to your thick skin: your very heart is iron.'

'Possibly, madam; may be, since it is the iron which makes such ships so dear; that is why I am so expensive. I own I spend a good deal of money: a man in my position can scarcely do otherwise in this country.'

'Then you had better try living abroad; you have been used to do that—cheaply.'

'Perhaps I may, madam; but in that case you may be sure of one thing—I shall take Spencer with me.'

Gwendoline broke down under that dreadful threat. She could not afford to

part with her boy, and far less intrust him to such a tutor. But something else broke down at the same time—the last link that had yet bound her to her husband. He conquered; but his victory cost him the relics of her love. They were henceforth dissevered and apart. Let him beware lest they should become not only alien, but antagonistic. Let him look to it, lest, having lost her love, a worse thing should befall him: he might earn her hate. There is none but herself who knows how dangerous that hate can be.

In the mean time she surrendered at discretion as to the money; and leaving her husband to enjoy himself after his own fashion in town, she withdrew herself to Glen Druid, to which Miss Ferrier and Edith were about to pay their visit, and whither Spencer was coming from Eton. To the content of both, husband and wife did not meet again for a considerable time.

Glen Druid is comparatively unchanged since the day when first we were invited thither. There are no trees, to be called such, in these parts, to grow and broaden, and the rock-bound coast is well nigh as changeless as the eternal sea. If improvement had been needed in the house itself—which it could scarcely be, so beautiful had been poor Giulia's home—Gwendoline had had no money to spare for such a purpose; and the place was just as it was. Spencer, who was very fond of it—delighting, boy-like, in the pleasures of the country, and hating the town—would sometimes interrogate his mother about Glen Druid in Mr Ferrier's time, and unwittingly reopen many a wound. Especially he would ask questions about Eady's father. For although the place was much the same, the tenants had altered. Eady had grown up to be an exquisitely beautiful young woman; and Spencer himself was so well grown and forward

that you might have almost thought him to be a man. He had sincerely mourned for Marion; but of Eady, who was more of an age with him, he was passionately fond.

As a general rule, boys, until they reach the age of hobbledehoyism, are quite indifferent to girls. They despise them, and are uncomfortable in their society; but it was not so with the young Etonian. With such parents, it was only to be expected that he should have no *mauvaise honte*, and his natural disposition was as tender and affectionate as it was spirited. Eady was fond of the bright lad, as those of her sex and age are wont to be sometimes of their young brothers; but with Spencer a different sort of fondness was growing up within him than that which is the portion of a sister. As they strolled together with her arm round his neck, or her hand placed lovingly upon his sunny hair, she did not know what grave delight

she gave him, or how he treasured up every word, and smile, and touch. That walk around the Warrior's Helm, which has already been the scene of at least one honest courtship, and of one misplaced passion, was now trodden by a pair quite different from either of those couples with whom we have been acquainted. In this case the passion—the courtship—if the fond dream of youth can be so termed, was all upon one side; the love was common to both. They would have laid down their lives for one another—these two—but from not quite the same motive. Their affection on both sides was disinterested, but (as usual) less unselfish on the side of the male. It never entered into Edith's heart that this Eton boy of sixteen, who had come home for the holidays with such joy again and again, because he passed them all in her sweet company, could be 'thinking seriously' of a young woman of near twenty years of age. The

same reason prevented others from seeing anything in Spencer's behaviour towards Edith which their long and affectionate intercourse did not account for. It was witnessed only by those who had seen them children together, and when the one had always played the part of elder sister, amusement-provider and protectress to the other. Even Gwendoline was blind to the true state of affairs, though from a very different cause. It seemed to her, *knowing what she did*, not only that a union between her son and Edith Ferrier was unnatural and impossible, but that the very idea must also be so. As in times past with Lord Luttrell, she had credited her son with a knowledge that he did not possess, and notwithstanding that she shuddered at the bare notion of his possessing it, because it monopolized her whole being, because she thought of it whenever she was compelled to think—that is, in every unoccupied and solitary

moment by day, and dreamed of it in her drugged sleep by night.

There was only one person in whom even a suspicion of the course which Spencer's affections were taking had arisen. Susan Barland—whose Samuel had been long snatched away from his healing arts by vengeful Death, and who was herself a more than middle-aged woman—perceived, or thought she perceived, that Miss Eady's old playmate was growing fast into her lover, and the idea filled her with repugnance and vague horror. Even she had been won over by the lad's honest ways, and just and kindly behaviour towards herself, as well (when there could not have been danger in it) as by his devotion to her beloved Eady; but she had never forgotten that he was Gwendoline's son; and now that this fatal attachment was springing up, that recollection went nigh to freeze her blood. In her own heart of hearts, she had always been con-

vinced that there had been foul play with respect to her old master's death, and she was not one to give up an opinion because it was not shared by others, or loose her hold of it through lapse of time. Moreover, though she never directly breathed a word of so grave a charge, she had now one to whom she could speak of Gwendoline's shortcomings and backslidings, and be sure of sympathy. Miss Ferrier, though full of years and infirmities, and very deaf, had still willing ears for talk of that sort. No pains were now taken by Gwendoline to keep her in good humour. She liked nothing better—so limited had the poor old lady's range of pleasures become—than, closeted with Susan in her own apartment at Glen Druid, to hear her relieve her mind, over a dish of tea, with scandal against Lady Luttrell. Again and again did the persistent widow go back upon the old story of her dead mistress, and descant upon how queer it was

that Dr Gisborne had been so submissive to Miss Treherne in concealing Giulia's danger; how strange it was, too, about the medicine and that; and again how shameless it was in Mrs Ferrier to write to Mr Mostyn, as was, before her own poor husband was cold. Through this edifying gossip, added to the want of 'attention' paid to her in the house, where formerly she had been made so much of, all Miss Ferrier's ancient dislike to Gwendoline was revived, as well as a sort of terror of her created, which she was unable in her feeble state to conceal. Her sister-in-law easily perceived it, and also the source from which it came, but only with bitter scorn. She smiled at her own folly in ever having entertained an apprehension of such contemptible antagonists as this dotting spinster and her tattling hanger-on. Her wretchedness was far too sublime to be affected by such a trumpery annoyance. Nor, indeed, so far as one of the two

offenders was concerned, did it last long; for Miss Ferrier, who had been long ailing, at last succumbed to one or the other of her numerous ailments, and died.

The event was of little consequence to Gwendoline, and certainly caused her not half the annoyance with which, about the same time, she learned that her husband was coming to Glen Druid. They had been absent from one another—save for a few brief meetings—for so very long, that the report had got abroad that they were separated. This rumour, or even the fact itself, would have affected neither of them, but the leader of fashion, to whom my Lord was still ‘devoted’ after his manner, had, it seemed, been outraged by the scandal that it was on her account that the Luttrels had quarrelled; she would not, she said, permit such an infamous falsehood to bear even that colour of truth which his Lordship’s absence from his home might impart to it, and she imperi-

ously ordered him down to Glen Druid. In the best society, there is no such thing as a hen-pecked husband, but though it is not the wives who are the tyrants, there is, nevertheless, a good deal of female tyranny. Lord Luttrell obeyed at once, though, indeed, there was another reason for seeking his wife's presence. He had lost frightful sums in gambling, and was threatened with ruin and dishonour. Without knowing either of the reasons which produced his visit—and certain only that they had nothing to do with regard for herself—Gwendoline awaited his arrival with gloom and bitterness.

CHAPTER XIV.

EADY'S PRUDENCE.

EDITH FERRIER, who had not an enemy in the world, would have been glad to have loved and respected all about her ; but this she could never accomplish with respect to Lord Luttrell. She was devoted to Gwendoline, and she could not but perceive, comparatively few as her opportunities of observation had been, that her step-mother was an ill-used wife. She loved Spencer dearly, and seeing that his father was wholly indifferent to him, she did not make the struggle to extenuate such unnatural conduct, as the good lad thought

it *his* duty to do. She understood vaguely that Lord Luttrell was dissipated and extravagant; and even that he was in great want of money: Gwendoline had informed her of the latter fact herself, partly to excuse her husband's dejection, which (so very thin was his Lordship's lacker) had, in his present state of boredom at Glen Druid, rather the form of moroseness towards everybody, and partly, perhaps, to elicit her intentions with respect to her property when she should come of age. Eady was generous to a fault, and when this revelation was made to her, she offered (for her step-mother's sake) to relieve Lord Luttrell from his embarrassments as soon as she should come of age. 'They tell me I am a great heiress,' said she, 'and I am sure I shall not know what to do with my money.'

'At all events, my dear, you need not throw it in the gutter,' was Gwendoline's grim reply. 'In the first place, my hus-

band's liabilities are enormous, and beyond anything you have imagined; and secondly, to give Lord Luttrell money—even if I could consent to such a sacrifice on my account—would be only to pour water into a sieve. If he had the whole of your great income to spend upon himself, he would be in debt by the end of the year. Of course we suffer because he is so poor; but that can't be helped, since he will always be so.'

'It must be very sad, however, to be poor,' said Eady. 'I shall take care that Spencer never suffers in that way. You can at least have no objection to my making provision for *him*; since that would not be done for your sake, but for his own.'

Gwendoline kissed the generous girl, and smiled encouragingly. She was desirous to hear in detail—for she had become exceedingly practical of late years, and especially with respect to money matters—what form this generous resolu-

tion was to take. Eady knew that there was a difficulty just then even in sending Spencer to Cambridge, on account of want of funds; and her private intention was, as soon as she came of age, to make over to him half her fortune; but she was too delicate in feeling to pursue the subject. Still Gwendoline had learned something which was useful to her in a certain discussion which took place shortly afterwards between her husband and herself respecting her step-daughter and ward. He had been arranging matters with her, not very agreeably — though, as usual when he was in straits, he was polite and comparatively conciliatory in manner—for the satisfying his more pressing creditors, and the staving off of others; and after all was settled, he began to speak of Edith. He was wholly indifferent to her existence, as he had been to that of Marion; but he was grown to be keen and calculating—as his wife had grown hard and grasping—in

all matters that concerned himself: he was not one to lose an opportunity however slight, an advantage however indirect, and therefore Eady was not left out of his reckoning with respect to the future. The idea of her marrying his son had entered into *his* mind. If the disparity of years, which, indeed, would have struck no one who was not aware of it—so tall and manly was Spencer, and so slight and child-like (just as her mother had been) was Edith—had been twice as great as it really was, it would have appeared no obstacle to Lord Luttrell, had his own advantage seemed to lie in such alliance; but it did not. He had a shrewd suspicion that he should not get much money out of Spencer, were he even to wed this heiress; for, in the first place, the boy was much more under the influence of Gwendoline than of himself; and secondly, he still had that ‘devil of a temper,’ a will of his own that would be neither cajoled nor

over-ridden. He was not one to be made a tool of; and he had a Quixotic sense of justice, that would probably make him refuse to expend any great proportion of his wife's property in paying his father's turf and card debts. And yet Lord Luttrell's views for Edith's future were matrimonial, as we shall see. 'That girl is getting to be very delicate,' said he; 'and if you don't take great care, Lady Luttrell, she will be going the way of her sister.'

'In which case, I dare say, you would grieve as deeply as you did for Marion,' was Gwendoline's cynical rejoinder, for his conduct on that occasion recurred to her vividly, and she was already in bitter mood with him.

'I should grieve a deuced deal more deeply, madam,' was his cool reply; 'since, if she dies before she comes of age, all she has will pass to some Scotch cousin, I suppose.'

‘I suppose it will.’

‘Well, if that is of no consequence to you, it is to me, madam; and I wish to prevent it.’

‘Prevent her dying?’ sneered Gwendoline. ‘You are very clever, Luttrell; the longer I know you, the cleverer you seem; but are you clever enough to prevent that?’

‘At all events, we may prevent the only thing which will make her loss of any consequence,’ observed he quietly; for he could still put some control upon his temper when it was his interest to do so, and he wanted Gwendoline’s help in what he was about to propose. ‘My idea is, Lady Luttrell, to get the girl married as quickly as we can, and while she is yet in tolerable health. She is now twenty, and must be brought out—the money for that can be found somewhere, surely; I should not wonder if you had a secret store yourself still left for such an exigency?’ And he

looked up at her sharply and greedily.

'I with a store!' said she contemptuously; 'I, who have a spendthrift for a husband! If your plan rests upon that basis, I tell you at once it is a rotten one.'

'It does not rest on that. What I mean to say is this, that as soon as Edith is brought out she will be surrounded by greedy fortune-hunters.'

'And also by the best *partis* in the kingdom,' was Gwendoline's quiet reply; 'for she is as beautiful and captivating as she is rich.'

'I don't wish to deny her attractions, madam; but we must take care to select her husband from those with whom her money is the principal object. We must marry her to some one whose relatives will make it worth our while. The negotiation will be delicate, no doubt; but if I can trust Lady Luttrell with the social difficulty, the getting the girl to choose the right man, I think I can answer for the

success of the business transaction. Our remuneration,' added Lord Luttrell reflectively, 'ought to be something in five figures at the very least.'

Though Gwendoline only answered by a grim smile, her husband felt satisfied that she not only thoroughly understood his suggestion, but would proceed to act upon it, and with a careless nod of his head he lounged out of the room.

It was quite true that the coming out of Edith Ferrier had been delayed to an extreme limit, and the fact had already excited remark. Society — the tender creature — felt a great interest in this young girl, much the same sort of interest that the betting-ring feels in the début on the turf of some young gentleman who has a great deal of money to spend. But for such feeders, what would become of the racing profession? And how could Society be kept up in its due state and glitter, if all young heiresses were to be kept at

home, wasting their affections on their own belongings, or giving their goods to feed the poor? Society resented it deeply in Edith Ferrier's case, where something like twenty thousand a year was involved, and openly murmured at her being kept so long in the back-ground by her step-mother; yet in this case Gwendoline was worse spoken of than she deserved. It was true that she had had no wish to introduce Eady into fashionable life; and indeed she had scarcely the money to do it in a fitting manner; but, on the other hand—not to mention that Edith infinitely preferred quiet at Glen Druid to riot in Mayfair—the state of the girl's health was a valid and genuine excuse for her seclusion.

Dr Gisborne is not consulted about her, because he has grown unequal to any such work; but famous physicians have come down from town to see Miss Ferrier, and pronounce upon her case by no means

favourably. The action of the heart is feeble, and they fear she has hereditary heart-disease ; her father died of that complaint, as Lady Luttrell tells them, and of course they do not doubt its being an admitted fact. Nothing is spared that could give her comfort or pleasure ; and her step-mother is, as usual, devoted in her personal attentions. Edith repays her, for the present, with the most grateful and loving trust, and hopes to be able to prove her gratitude in a more material manner. There is not a single subject of disagreement between them, and only one of difference—namely, Susan Barland. Eady is very fond of her, as her poor sister who died was, and as Aunt Judith was ; she likes to have Susan with her in the long evenings, when she does not feel strong enough to meet company in the drawing-room, and to ask her questions about the dead father and mother, of whom, of course, she remembers nothing.

But, taught by experience, Susan is very reticent and cautious in her replies. Edith is not at all alarmed about herself in the sense of fear, but she has an impression that she shall be very short-lived. And if she has really this hereditary malady, it behoves her to provide against the worst. She makes up her mind that directly she becomes of age she will make her will. She need not now give Spencer the money she had designed for him (though she will take care he has all he needs), for she feels that he will not have long to wait for it, and she will leave it him by bequest. He shall have half her fortune, and her dear step-mother the other half. That will show, when she is gone, how gratefully she felt towards her and hers. When that is once done, no matter what happens, the dearest wish of her young heart will then have been accomplished.

In the autumn preceding her majority, Eady was taken abroad, and in the winter

returned to London, where her coming of age was to be celebrated. She had not seen Spencer for nearly four months, and hardly recognized the handsome, manly young fellow who held out eager arms to welcome her. For the first time, she returned his embrace with some timidity. Since he had grown so preposterously tall, it struck her that she must really give up kissing him ; but although Eady was also become more womanly, the same idea by no means occurred to Spencer. He was rapturously and irrevocably in love with her; and it was no wonder. A more beautiful and elegant young woman had not made her appearance in the world of fashion since her step-mother—a beauty of a very different class, however—had made her *début*. She was somewhat slight in figure, but very animated and *spirituelle*-looking. At the great entertainment which was given upon her birthday—a very magnificent affair, and one which showed, as

everybody allowed, that Lady Luttrell was prepared to do her duty by her after all — she was the most admired of all the daughters of fashion. It was jealously remarked, indeed, that it was not quite good taste thus to bear the bell away in one's own house; though Eady could not help being so exquisitely beautiful, nor refuse to wear the splendid attire that became her so well, and which was her step-mother's own gift. Lord Luttrell was not present; he was angry that his advice with respect to getting the girl married before her majority had been disregarded; and he could not see any use in being bored with entertaining people. But his popularity had long been on the wane, and he was little missed; while Spencer made a much more attractive substitute. Altogether, the fête was a great success.

The very next morning, after their late breakfast, Edith informed Lady Luttrell that the first use she wished to make

of her independence was to send for a lawyer and give him instructions for her will.

‘Your *will*, my darling!’ smiled Gwendoline. ‘What makes you think of wills? I should have thought that marriage settlements—if your thoughts must needs take a legal direction—would have rather been running in your mind. I wish you could have heard half the pretty things that were said of you in *my* ear last night.’

‘I would like to see the lawyer, nevertheless,’ said Eady simply. ‘I am of age now, you see, my dear Lady Luttrell; and one never knows what may happen.’

Gwendoline still made some faint show of resistance, but eventually gave way, with an eulogistic remark upon the young girl’s forethought and wisdom. Some people foolishly shrank from making their wills, as though their doing so could make them more liable to death; and others held it a bad omen. She was glad to see

her Eady had no such foolish fancies, and was so sensible and prudent.

So Mr Mumm, of the great firm of Mumm and Chance, who act for half the noble families in England, and for the Luttrels among them, was sent for forthwith; and Edith was closeted with him for two mortal hours, during which impatient Spencer more than once knocked at the door, with eager inquiries as to when that 'stupid business' would be over, and leave her free to ride with him in the park, and without the slightest suspicion that the affair which engaged this affectionate creature was the bequeathing him nearly nine thousand a year. At last her directions were made plain, and the man of law departed, promising to bring the deed, duly drawn up, to Glen Druid, whither they were on the point of departing, for her signature and execution.

On the ensuing day, they left town for what was now her own home. There were

great rejoicings there also in honour of the young heiress ; and she was admired by all at least as much as she had been in town. But Mrs Barland, who was now resident at Glen Druid, remarked that her darling, although more beautiful than ever, was looking far from well. Eady was indeed by no means in good health ; but she was also fidgety and nervous about her will. Within the week, however, the lawyer arrived, according to promise, and that document was duly executed.

CHAPTER XV.

A LISTENER THAT HEARS GOOD OF HERSELF.

THE change in Miss Eady's looks when she had 'made all safe whatever happened' with respect to the disposal of her fortune, was so striking, that Susan Barland could not fail to remark upon it when they were next alone together. 'You are peaky and fragile enough still, my darling, and will want a deal of nursing; but you certainly have picked up most uncommon since you came home from that horrid London: you are not like the same young lady.'

'Indeed, Susan,' returned Edith, smil-

ing, 'I am afraid I am the very same, and likely to give everybody about me a great deal of trouble, though I don't think it will be for long.'

'Lor, Miss Eady, how can you talk so?—you make my blood run cold. Just as I was comforting myself, too, with how much clearer and brighter you looked.'

'Well, the fact is, Susan, there has been a great weight just taken off my mind. I have been afraid for these many months that I should never live to be of age; and when I did, I was still more apprehensive that the thing for which I wished to come of age would never be accomplished. But now I am thankful to say I have no anxiety about anything.'

'You surely have never been making your will, Miss Edith?' inquired Susan excitedly.

'Yes, I have. Why not?'

'Well, there is no reason "why not," of course; only, it seems a strange thing for

so young a person to do, and to have been so eager about ;' and Susan involuntarily sank her voice, and cautiously looked round her as she added : ' You were not set on to do it by any one, Miss Eady, were you ? '

' Certainly not, Susan. Who should have set me on ? '

' And how have you left your money, Miss Eady ? '

The simplicity of this inquiry caused Edith to laugh heartily. ' Well, my dear Susan, I don't mind telling *you*, though I don't think it is usual for people to make such revelations. In the first place, I have left to Susan Barland, my dear mother's and sister's faithful friend and mine, the sum of five hundred pounds.'

' Heaven grant I may never inherit it !' said Susan fervently.

' If you are going to say that, instead of " Amen " to all my testamentary intentions,' said Edith smiling, ' I had better not say anything more about them.'

‘Please, go on, if you don’t mind, Miss Eady,’ urged the other gravely. ‘I should like to hear *so much*.’

‘I had no idea you were so inquisitive, Susan. Well, there are some other little bequests, such as that I have mentioned; but with those exceptions, I have divided all I have into two portions, and left one to dear Lady Luttrell, and one to Spencer.’

‘You surely have never done that!’ gasped Susan. ‘Oh, tell me you are only in joke—that you are not in earnest, dear Miss Eady?’

‘But I *am* in earnest, Susan. And why not? To whom else should I leave my fortune, but to those I love, and who have been so kind to me? Dear papa had no relatives, except a very distant cousin or two, who have never perhaps heard of my existence: and I am sure he would have approved of what I have done.’

A cold dew sat on Susan’s forehead. She trembled for her darling, and yet she

was at her wit's end what to do. Her sole hope, as it seemed to her, lay in the answer to her next question, which she put, however, as calmly as she could.

‘Does her Ladyship know of this will, Eady?’

‘She is aware that I have made a will, but does not know the provisions of it.’

Susan did not answer: she was debating within herself whether she should boldly entreat the girl to represent to her step-mother that she had thought it right to leave all her fortune to the Ferrier blood, from whence it came; but what argument could she urge in favour of such a course, and how was she to persuade straightforward Eady to dissimulate, with one, too, to whom she was so much attached as she was to Lady Luttrell?

Fortunately, Edith did not notice her perplexity, being herself full of solemn though not sombre thoughts. ‘I cannot

think,' said she, 'why you, Susan, who are so serious in your ideas, should wonder at my having provided against the common lot. I hope you are not one of those superstitious folks that dear Lady Luttrell spoke of when I first mentioned the subject, who think that the act of making a will brings one nearer to death. You don't think *that*, Susan, surely, do you?'

'I don't know,' cried Susan wildly; 'don't ask me. I have heard of such things. O dear, O dear!'

'This is very silly of you, Susan,' said Edith gravely; 'and I gave you credit for more sense.'

'But, my dear Miss Eady, you yourself told me you had a presentiment—a dreadful notion of being like to die.'

'It is not a dreadful one, Susan,' returned the young girl calmly, 'nor is it a mere morbid fancy. It is surely not likely—to look at me—that I should be a long-lived person; and did not my poor father

die of this very disease, which the doctors say I have inherited ?'

'It is said so, Miss Eady.'

'Well, and did not my dear mother, who, as you have often said, was the very image of me, die young, and our sweet Marion also ? I am sure I have no wish to live except in so far as I can make those who love me happy by it ; and perhaps I should do them more good by dying. But at the same time I am not going to die on purpose, you silly Susan. Don't you see ?'

Susan answered quietly that she saw that, and only hoped that her dear Miss Eady would be more cheerful about herself. But she, too, had now a presentiment in her turn ; she was thoroughly convinced that her darling's life was in danger in quite another way than she herself suspected, and resolutely made up her mind to ward it from her all she could. She did not dare speak further just now ; but she determined that this victim at

least should not be sacrificed without due warning. She was fortunately under the same roof with her, and could watch over her day and night. Lady Luttrell was a terrible foe, but Susan's long cessation from hostilities and seeming submission had reaped this much of good, that she was no longer suspected by her. She was now treated with such perfect indifference that Lady Luttrell appeared almost unconscious of her existence.

Gwendoline, indeed, had now scarcely a thought for any human creature, save Spencer, herself, and Edith, to whom her regards fell in that order. To all the rest of the world she was become a stern, hard, but irreproachable woman, with a very sharp eye to money. Notwithstanding her still marvellous beauty and stately manners, she had become in some degree vulgarized. Her passion for Piers had been, after all, in some sort—notwithstanding that it wrought such ruin—a refining and

humanizing influence, and it was now trodden under foot. People of her own class noticed that 'she had got over all that nonsense about her husband;' and they were right. She lived in their sight on terms of distant courtesy with him, and in open contempt and bitterness when they were alone. The only tender link between her and humanity was now her son. She was wholly wrapped up in, and devoted to, him. She would have laid down her life for him; and if she had thought there was still any hope of salvation for her soul (a question, however, that never suggested itself), she would have sacrificed that also for his sake.

Spencer, as much older than his years in mind as he was in external appearance, was very fond of his mother, but by no means unaware that there was something strange about her—something in her nature that not only kept her aloof from others, but even kept *him* aloof from *her*. He had

never heard from her lips any of those tender reminiscences which mothers love to relate to their children. She was reticent about her past, and all who had been concerned with it. She had her own thoughts, her own ways, and her own work to do ; and yet she seemed to have an insuperable objection to be left alone ; she never *was* alone by day now, for even when she believed herself to be so, Susan Barland followed her like her shadow. Though, with all her watchfulness and keen observation, the latter could not discover that Lady Luttrell possessed any absolute knowledge of the contents of her step-daughter's will, yet her suspicion did not relax. The more she reflected on the matter, the more important it seemed to her that Miss Eady should keep her testamentary intentions secret ; and the first opportunity she had of urging this, she seized accordingly. It was while she was attending to her young lady's toilet, late

one morning, 'when Edith had had her breakfast, as was now often the case, in her own room, and the rest of the household were engaged elsewhere. Through the double window, Lady Luttrell could be seen walking to and fro upon the upper terrace with Spencer, and Edith had made some admiring remark upon the affection that existed between the pair.

'Yes, Miss Eady, it is very pleasant to see it,' answered Susan; 'and yet their love for one another does not seem to be of the same sort.'

'How so, Susan?'

'Well, if you have not noticed it yourself, Miss Eady, I can scarcely explain it. But, as it strikes me, Lady Luttrell's love is passionful-like, and quite independent of its being deserved.'

'And yet, you know, she is fond of *me*, Susan,' said Edith smiling. 'Really, you are not inclined to be complimentary to anybody this morning, it seems. Now,

what have you got to say against Spencer?’

‘Well, nothing, my dear: I only wish all belonging to him was like him. But with respect to what I was saying about the difference in the affection of those two, *his* love could never be placed long where it was unmerited—that is, not if he knew it to be so. He is always quiet and respectful enough, for instance, before my Lord—although, when there has been a breeze between them, I have seen him stand up stiff enough upon his mother’s side; but it is plain that he and his father do not hit it off. He does not love him, because he cannot honour him.’

‘Lord Luttrell gives himself very little pains to conciliate Spencer,’ observed Edith; ‘and indeed takes little notice of him at all.’

‘That is very true, Miss Eady; but it would be all the same if my Lord pre-

tended to love him ever so. 'There could be nobody who strove to make himself more pleasant to Mr Spencer when he was a lad than did Barnes the coachman; he was quite a slave to him, and not for the mere sake of currying favour, as I honestly believe, but because he was really fond of him; and yet, when that story came out about Barnes's ill-treatment of the stable-help—beating and swearing at the poor fellow all day as he did—Mr Spencer would not have another word to say to him. I do believe if his own mother were to behave ill, and lose his respect—'

'Hush, Susan, we will not even suppose such a thing,' said Edith gravely. 'Lady Luttrell may not be a favourite of yours, but she is incapable of any ill conduct; and not only that,' added the young girl with grateful enthusiasm: 'it is not in her outward behaviour alone that she is so admirable; her feelings, as I have

reason to know, are particularly refined and delicate.'

'No doubt, Miss Eady,' returned the other quietly; 'and that reminds me to ask you a question; you have not told her Ladyship, I hope, of how you have left your money?'

'No, Susan; I have not. But why should you hope anything of the kind?'

Ah, why, indeed? That question was not put by Eady alone, but by another, and with infinitely more of solicitude for the reply. Gwendoline had come in from her walk while the two were talking, and was even now at the threshold of her step-daughter's chamber. She had come up as usual to inquire how she had passed the night, and her footsteps upon the thick-carpeted stair had escaped even the watchful Susan, whose mind, besides, was just then engrossed with the business she had on hand. Lady Luttrell had found the

door open, and was about to lift the curtain that hung across it, to secure the delicate girl from draughts of air, when Susan's inquiry met her ear. No wonder, then, that with raised finger, as though in warning to her own wary self, and head inclined, she echoed Edith's counter-question: 'Why should you hope that I have not told my step-mother how I have left my money?' The face of the listener was very white and serious, and her lips closed tightly together as she awaited the reply.

'Well, because, Miss Eady, it would not be a nice thing to do. For since, as you say, her Ladyship is so refined and delicate in her feelings, it would grieve and trouble her, I am sure, if she knew that you had done so much—I mean so very much—for her and hers. Half to your step-mother, and half to Mr Spencer, is such a great bequest, I am sure it would greatly annoy her, even if she did not absolutely insist upon some alteration.'

‘Perhaps you are right, Susan,’ said Edith reflectively, ‘although I really don’t see why it should be so. Lady Luttrell has a perfect right to all that I can do to show my affection for her ; but I will take your advice, and keep the matter secret.’

Lady Luttrell’s quick ear caught the approach of a servant, and she moved noiselessly away ; but she had already heard enough. Edith had left her fortune then, in equal parts to herself and Spencer. That was great news indeed. And then as to this woman, Susan—of whom, when she had heard her put that question, she had really almost begun to be again suspicious—what a poor fool, with her imputations of delicacy and scrupulous fine feelings, was she ! She need certainly entertain no apprehensions for the future upon *her* account.

For even the quickened intelligence of Gwendoline had seen no other than the apparent motive in Susan’s advice to Edith ;

and was on her part no less in a fool's paradise than was poor Susan, who had murmured to herself: 'Thank Heaven!' when her dear Miss Eady had promised not to inform her step-mother of her kind intentions, at the very moment that the secret was revealed and the mischief done. However great and imminent, therefore, might be Edith's peril, the faithful ally that she had about her was unsuspected, and all the more so in that she had involuntarily absolved herself from suspicion.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO INTERVIEWS.

SPENCER was at Cambridge, and Lady Luttrell and her step-daughter alone at Glen Druid, when evil news came from my Lord in town. There never was any good news from him or of him now-a-days, or tidings of any sort which Gwendoline cared to hear, but this was the worst news that had yet arrived. He wrote to her to say that his luck had been more against him than ever, and that in endeavouring to recoup himself at Newmarket upon a 'moral certainty,' he had lost a frightful sum. He was, in fact, unless she helped

him at once, and largely, a ruined man; nor was even this the worst; he hinted, though so darkly that few but the keen eyes for which his words were written could have fathomed his meaning, that he had had the folly (for so he termed it, knowing that she would surely help him out of the 'scrape') to forge an acceptance of a bill. So terrible was his strait, that he, for the first time, condescended to express some sorrow for his past behaviour towards her, and to promise amendment for the future; 'only,' he concluded, 'for any sake, raise this money, no matter at what cost.' There was also a postscript of two words: 'Try Edith.'

For a few moments Gwendoline hesitated: she stood alone in her boudoir, one hand caressing her fair, unyielding face, and the other resting softly upon the velvet table; but she was not considering her husband's proposition at all. She had made up her mind as to that on the first

instant, and the answer might have been read in her scornful eyes. ‘No, sir, not *now*; the time is past in any case, but certainly not *now*, when whatever I give you must needs be taken from what will be my own or Spencer’s.’ She was only debating within herself whether she should keep this letter with its fatal admission to hold over him as a menace for the future, to have used against him, if need were, by the man he had robbed; or whether she should destroy it. Finally, however, she tore the letter up into the smallest shreds, and then sat down to write her reply. It was quite out of the question, she wrote, that she could ask Edith to advance so enormous a sum, indeed she felt quite sure that the girl would refuse to be so pillaged. He must help himself out of the affair how he could. The best advice she could give him, was, for the present at least, to go abroad. She would recommend Sweden, where there was capercailzie-shooting, and

no international treaty with respect to the surrender of criminals.

It would be bitter counsel, yet one which she knew he must needs take, and both reflections pleased her. She wanted him at home less than ever just now, for she had a plan of her own in view which this news urged her to execute, and it was one that was easier to effect without spectators. She was for once even glad that Spencer was not at home.

Edith, always delicate, and often dejected, was now become more of an invalid than ever. She was surrounded with all those safeguards and precautions which, in the case of those who are only ailing, do at least as much harm in depressing the patient as they do good. The few people who came to visit the gentle girl were mysteriously informed that she was not to be excited; and by many a sad shake of the head and melancholy smile her hopeless condition was implied. Edith, in fact,

was in a fair way of being killed with kindness—or what so resembled it as to be taken for such even by its object—when a most unexpected event took place: Lord Luttrell himself suddenly appeared at Glen Druid, accompanied by Spencer. Her husband had not replied to her last letter, nor had Gwendoline expected him to do so. She had pictured him to herself reading it with furious eyes, crumpling it up with a savage malediction upon herself and all the world, and then betaking himself to flight abroad. Yet here he was, and what seemed even more inopportune to her just then, he had brought their son with him. The long vacation had not yet commenced, and the latter's appearance was, therefore, even still less accountable.

Lord Luttrell and his wife greeted one another as usual; they had stereotyped smiles and phrases for all such interviews before folks; but the instant that Spencer had received and returned his mother's af-

fectionate embrace, and without one word in explanation of his presence, he cried : ' Where's Eady ? '

' She is gone for a little walk upon the Warrior's Helm, my darling,' replied she gravely. ' I am afraid you will find her much altered ; she is certainly far from well.'

Spencer bounded off with a pale face, and met the young girl on the very spot once sacred to the passion of Mr Samuel Barland.

It was one of those warm and lovely days which are given to us in May, as if in foretaste of the midsummer : and yet she had sought this place for shelter, for even the west wind made her shiver.

' My own sweet darling ! ' cried Spencer, shocked at her wan cheeks, the glad flush on which, however, did not render her less beautiful. ' How is it that I hear such sad news of you ? I must never, never leave you again ! '

His arms were open, and she had fallen into them almost before she was aware. The sudden joy of seeing him, and the recollection of her own weakness, as much as her weakness itself, gave her no other choice. She had scarcely strength to stand upright, far less to disengage herself from his embrace ; but, for his part, he willingly took her passiveness for consent. ‘ Oh, how long I have loved you, my own Eady ! ’ murmured he, ‘ and yet, though you must have known it, you have never, until now, shown that you returned it. There, sit down, and tell me all about your own dear self ; and promise me, O promise me, to soon get well and strong ! ’

He placed her tenderly upon the seat cut in the solid rock, from which nothing could be seen but the wide Atlantic, and on it but a few distant sails ; and knelt down at her feet.

‘ Spencer,’ gasped she, ‘ dear Spencer, you are surely not in earnest to speak

thus! I always loved you like a brother; but—you are so young—and I—'

'And you so old! O yes, you look quite old, my darling, being so stout and masculine!' answered he with a loving smile. 'I should think, if I did not know your age—and judging from your cunning worldly look—that you were fifteen.'

'But I am twenty-two, and more, dear Spencer, and you are but eighteen. This is only a boyish fancy of yours, and—'

'A fancy!' broke in the other, seizing her one ungloved finger, and placing upon it, in spite of all her resistance, an opal ring. '“If to have dreamed by night, and thought of you by day,” for all my life, dear Eady—if to have loved you better than my own mother, when I was still in the nursery, and you but my child play-mate—if to have seen your sweet face shining before me when I have been doing my duty, and to have felt it averted from me when I have been doing wrong—if to

have had you for my guardian angel from my birth, and to have been grateful for it with my whole soul—is a boyish fancy, then indeed have I had that for you. But of late years, Eady, and since I have grown to be a man, I have felt sure—I have known—and O the dear delight of that sweet knowledge—I have known whom I love, and who will be my wife!’

To look at him kneeling before her, with his brown curls thrown back from his bonnie face, and his passionate pleading eyes, was a spectacle too bright and tender for woman’s heart to resist. Edith leaned forward and kissed his forehead. But she had not given up all show of resistance yet.

‘I do believe you love me, Spencer, or at least that you think you do, but I cannot permit you to be thus carried away by impulse. You are yet but a boy in years.’

‘Time will cure that, my pretty one.’

‘Yes; but there is one thing that it

will *not* cure, Spencer dear, but very much the reverse; there is the disparity in our years. I shall be an old woman when you'—'No,' thought Edith to herself, and for the first time in her life this reflection gave her a bitter pang; 'I shall never be an old woman, nor perhaps shall I even live to marry him.'

'Disparity, my darling Eady!' returned Spencer gravely; 'do not let us talk of disparities; because, in that case, I shall indeed scarcely venture to seek my own happiness; for you, you know, are an heiress, though Heaven is my witness that I should love you all the same if you had not a shilling; and I—the Luttrels were always poor—and I shall be *very* poor, Eady—the poorest of any of them. My father owes debts which, when I come of age, I must needs pay. He came to Cambridge to me about them, and it is on that account I am now here.'

'But let *me* pay them,' exclaimed Edith

tenderly: 'my money is yours in any case, my darling. Why not?'

'No, Eady, no,' replied the young man proudly. 'My father's debts—so far as it is possible—must be paid by my father's son. I only mentioned the circumstance because you began to talk about disparities, my darling—and there is certainly a very important disparity between us, which is, however, not one of years. But you won't refuse me because you are such a great heiress, Eady, *will you?*'

Whether Edith intended to reply that she would not refuse him upon that account, or that she would not refuse him at all, when she put her arms about his neck and whispered, 'No, darling,' may be a question for the grammarian; but Spencer Mostyn, for his part, certainly did not entertain a doubt about it, and he thanked her for her reply in love's time-honoured fashion. On none of the shores that fringe the vast Atlantic was a more happy pair

than they who now sat together in that rocky bower, hand clasped in hand, and lip pressed to cheek. A new life seemed to have begun for both of them.

In the mean time, a very different sort of interview was taking place within-doors—a scene of violence and recrimination between Lord and Lady Luttrell, such as had had hitherto no parallel even beneath that unhappy roof. The former exhausted all his arts in vain to obtain better terms for himself than her letter to him had indicated; and when they failed, he gave the reins to his insolent fury; but she never wavered for an instant. The same cold look of scorn confronted him when he invoked her pity, and reminded her of their dead passion, as when he raved, just as the grim cliff beneath them defied ocean, alike when it fawned or raged. And yet she was angry too, and twice was almost moved to give her wrath full utterance. Once, when he told her he had brought

Spencer away from Cambridge with the intention of using *his* influence with Edith, since Gwendoline refused to employ hers; and again, when he let her know that his hint about the forged acceptance (though the temptation had actually occurred to him) was a lie, designed in part to enhance the greatness of his necessity, and in part to prove her—whether indeed she would see him suffer disgrace and exile, rather than speak a few soft words for him to a girl with whom her wish was law. She was furious then, not at his deception, but at the disappointment of finding he was still free to plague her. If the crooking of her little finger at that moment would have saved him from the gallows, she would have kept it straight in splints; yet all she said was: ‘I am indeed surprised to hear that you resisted a temptation, Luttrell, but I am not surprised you lied.’

If it was terrible to see this pair, still so well favoured and so young, distorted

with hate and scorn of one another, while health, and wealth, and rank, and all that men call good seemed to be theirs, what must needs their condition be, still unwillingly yoked together, should poverty, and pain, and weight of years befall them !

CHAPTER XVII.

RENOUNCED.

NOTWITHSTANDING the violence of the emotions which had agitated Lord and Lady Luttrell, there was no trace of storm to be seen in either when they appeared that evening. Lady herself had come down to dinner, though she now usually took her meals above-stairs, and before *her*, of all people, it was expedient to show no ill-feeling. My Lord, indeed, whose temper had suffered of late years by reason of his 'confounded luck,' was not at all times so particular, but on this occasion he was especially courteous and winning in his

manner. Smooth and polished as he might be, however, Edith well knew that he was at heart a stone. He had neither the perseverance nor the powers of dissimulation that Gwendoline possessed, while the fascinations on which he so justly prided himself were quite thrown away upon the simple-hearted heiress. Lady Luttrell had no need to alter her behaviour towards her step-daughter for any purpose of conciliation; it was marked by the same tender care for her health and comfort as usual, and no more. It had, however, been necessary for her to apply another petal or two to those false rose-leaves which now almost habitually hid the pallor of her cheeks: and while she seemed so delicately to ply her knife and fork, she held them with a clutch of steel. The conversation at table, which was of a light and sparkling sort, was almost entirely maintained by my Lord and Lady, and certainly did the utmost credit to their self-command.

Spencer and Eady spoke but little, but their thoughts were none the less agreeable upon that account. It had been agreed between them that their engagement should not at present be made known to Lord and Lady Luttrell; there was the question of time to be still settled between them, Edith being of opinion that Spencer should not marry till he came of age, and thoroughly 'knew his own mind;' and Spencer opining that a month hence would be quite a sufficient limit. 'They were not,' he urged, 'like young people who had any need to see something more of one another before marriage; and why should they not be made happy at once?' It was an agreeable subject enough for their discussion, and it was settled between them that they should talk it over together the next day upon the Warrior's Helm; and in the mean time, each had promised to think about it—a promise which, it must be allowed, they were both performing.

The light was very bright in Eady's eyes that night, and her step-mother noticed it to Spencer with a sigh, and a comment upon the delicacy of constitution it portended; when, somewhat to her surprise, he rallied her upon her melancholy forebodings, and remarked that though she was 'always killing people,' dear Eady would not fulfil her dismal prophecies, but be a strong woman yet. Gwendoline shook her head, and hoped it might be so, 'for all their sakes.'

They sat up in the drawing-room that night quite late—that is, for Glen Druid—and Lady Luttrell had gently to remind her step-daughter of the imprudence she was therein committing.

The docile girl immediately prepared to retire. Gwendoline kissed her on the forehead in answer to her affectionate embrace. Lord Luttrell took her hand and held it, while he passed a graceful compliment upon her improved looks. Spencer

gave her fairy fingers one quick meaning pressure, that made her young heart beat, she scarce knew why.

Alone with faithful Susan, she yearned to reveal to her her great happiness—the new-found joy that buoyed her spirits, and seemed to give new life to her very frame. And yet she hesitated to do so; this secret of her soul seemed to be so sacred. She purposely delayed her toilet far beyond the usual time. ‘I had expected Lady Luttrell to bring me some cough-mixture,’ said she, ‘but I suppose she has forgotten it.’

‘Shall I fetch it, dear Miss Eady?’

‘No, Susan. My cough is not troublesome; indeed, I have not felt so well for many a day: and I am not sorry to think that we are quite alone to-night. I want to have a talk with you, Susan.’

‘Let us talk in the morning, my darling,’ returned the affectionate creature; ‘for though I love a chat with you of all

things, yet it is much better that you should have your sleep.'

'I should not sleep to-night, Susan, even if you left me. My mind is full of thoughts; not presentiments or "fallals," as you call them, but thoughts of the past. How old did you tell me my dear mother was when she married papa?'

'Lor, Miss Eady, she was as young, as young; she was always a child to look at—much like you are, up to the very day of her death; but when she married she was a child indeed; two or three years younger than you are; when she died, indeed she was scarcely older. But don't you go thinking of *that*.'

'I am not thinking of her death, Susan, but of her marriage.'

'And a much better thing for a young lady to have on her mind,' said Susan approvingly. 'Well, your papa was as good a husband as ever breathed; but he certainly was a deal too old for her.'

There ought never to be such a great difference between man and wife, in my opinion. I hope you will never marry an old man, Miss Eady.'

Edith smiled. 'Still, Susan, one may err in the other direction, and marry too young a one: that would be still worse, would it not?'

'Certainly not, Miss Eady. My poor Samuel was just a year or two younger than myself, and it was all the better for him. A man wants in a wife one to whom he can look up, and ask advice from, and not a mere pretty plaything. If ever I was to marry again—which, however, I am not fool enough to do, for I have seen the evil of it in others—I should still choose a young man for my husband. You're laughing, Miss Eady—thinking, belike, that I could not get one. But I could if I would—and plenty of them. My poor Samuel was not so saving as I could have wished him; but I always guided

him in money matters, and we throve accordingly; and now, since I have been with you, I have saved money again. So you see I am a sort of heiress, like yourself, miss, and there is no lack of suitors with such as us.'

Edith, shaking with inward laughter at this naïve comparison, did not trust herself to speak; and Susan, nothing loath to pursue a subject upon which she considered herself as an authority, continued her matrimonial discourse.

'Now, what you have to guard against, Miss Eady, is the being sought in marriage for your money, and not for yourself. In my case, there can be no doubt about the matter: when any of those impudent fellows below-stairs begin to praise *me*, I know that they are really thinking of my little freehold at St Medards, and the share or two which they know I happen to have in Glendallack; but with you it will be more difficult to separate chaff from corn.

You may well think, when some fine gentleman protests that you are the very apple of his eye, that you *are* his apple—and yet you mayn't be, my darling, for all that. The advice I would give to you, Miss Eady, supposing I was to take any liberty of the kind, would be this: Don't be in a hurry to say "Yes" to any such folk. You can marry a fortune-hunter—if you *must* marry one—at two-and-forty just as well as at two-and-twenty; for you will be equally attractive in his view at any age, and, indeed, when you are *very* old (as I have seen with my own eyes), quite charming. But, on the other hand, if you chance to meet with a young fellow who has an honest heart, and you have reason to believe it's inclined towards you for something else than your great income (you can have your money all settled upon yourself, you know, and give him an allowance, the amount of which might depend upon his good behaviour)—well, then,

I say, no matter though he is as poor as a kirk-mouse, just marry him.'

'And that is really your advice, Susan, is it?' inquired Edith smiling.

'Yes, my darling,' returned the widow simply; 'and the sooner you find such a young gentleman to take care of you,' added she with a sigh, 'the sooner I shall be pleased, Heaven knows.'

'And supposing I *have* found such a one, Susan?' said Edith softly—'just such a one as you speak of, who has no thought of greed, and would love me all the same though I were penniless; one that I have known so long that I cannot be mistaken in him; one whom I have loved as it were without even knowing it, until he asked the question with his own sweet lips?'

'Oh, who is it, Miss Eady?' cried Susan, trembling with impatience. 'Dear, dear, how pleased I am! How happy shall I be when you are safely married, and with a husband to look after you,

better than a poor woman like me can do —though he will hardly love you more, Heaven knows. Oh, my darling, do I know him? — have I seen him? But, then, that is not likely, of course. He is doubtless some young gentleman in town.'

'No, Susan, dear, he is not; he loves town no better than I do, which is not at all; and you have seen him often, and know him very well, and like him very much. What! can't you guess my secret even now, Susan? Why, who can it be but Spencer?'

'Spencer!' shrieked Susan Barland, starting from her chair, and clasping her hands wildly. 'Not Spencer Mostyn—not Lady Luttrell's son?'

'Who else, Susan? What can you mean? Has he not earned my love? and is he not worthy of it? I tell you it is *I*, rather, who am not worthy of him—the brightest and best of men! What have

you—what has any one—to say against dear Spencer?’

For the first time in all her life, Edith Ferrier's eyes flashed with fierce scorn; her slender frame was drawn to its full height; her childish face crimsoned with jealous rage.

‘My own darling Miss Eady,’ cried Susan, trembling violently, ‘don't look like that, or you will break my heart. I know no harm of Mr Spencer, and, indeed, nothing but good. But you must never marry him—indeed, indeed, you must not.’

‘You must be mad, Susan,’ answered Edith haughtily. ‘How dare you say such words? Not marry Spencer!—he that is my love, my life, my all. Why not? But no; I will not listen to you.’

‘You must—you must, Miss Eady,’ replied Susan, wringing her hands. ‘There is something—not his fault—but something—Oh, great Heaven! how shall I tell her? It's his birth, Miss Eady: it's be-

cause he is his mother's son that you can never wed him.'

'Why not?'

'*Because she killed your father,*' gasped Susan hoarsely. 'Yes—poisoned him; she did it, as sure as I am a living woman. And she has it in her mind to poison *you*.'

Edith's nerves, wound up already to a pitch far beyond their wont, here entirely gave way, and she sank upon the floor in violent hysterics.

Gwendoline, who was on her way to her step-daughter's chamber at that very moment, was the first to arrive; but Spencer, alarmed by the young girl's shrieks, and winged by love, was almost as quick as she.

'What is the matter, Eady?'

'My own darling, what is the matter?'

Robed in her white dressing-gown, with her long dark tresses hanging down her back, and on the ground about her, Edith raised herself upon one elbow, and

gazed upon Lady Luttrell with eyes that seemed to be starting out of their sockets. 'The matter?' moaned she. 'O grant, kind Heaven, that this woman here be mad, or else— She says that you—you, Lady Luttrell—killed my father—your own husband—poisoned him.'

'She *lies*,' cried Spencer haughtily.

'Young man, I wish I did,' answered Susan solemnly; 'as I shall have to answer for my sins on judgment-day, I swear she did it. I denounce her as the murderess of my master; I accuse her'— And here, as though actuated by an uncontrollable impulse, she rushed up to Lady Luttrell, and seized her firmly by the wrist. 'This woman has a phial of poison in her hand, with which she was to have slain Miss Eady this very night! Help! help me, Mr Spencer!'

It was a terrible sight, for Gwendoline had at last awakened from the dull torpor of terror into which the suddenness of the

charges brought against her had cast both body and mind, and was getting the better of the waiting-woman in the struggle. But Spencer strode forward, and with his own hands unclenched his mother's fingers, and drew the phial forth.

Then Gwendoline, not knowing how little was known, and how much guessed, and overcome with frantic terror, fell down upon her knees before Edith. 'I have done my duty to you, girl,' exclaimed she appealingly, 'for more than twenty years—'

'But with what motive?' struck in Susan fiercely, and pointing to the phial, now in Spencer's grasp. Her defeat of long ago, and compelled reticence through half a lifetime, had transformed this woman into a very Nemesis. 'Your whole life, since you slew her father, has been an acted lie,' cried she, the consciousness that she was the instrument of divine retribution (rather than mere revengeful triumph),

elevating her very style : 'your every kindness was but feigned to smooth the way to cruelty ; your very love was hate.'

'It was *not* hate,' urged Gwendoline passionately ; 'I swear I did not hate her, and if I did—O Spencer, my own darling boy—it was only for your sake.' She turned towards her son, and caught his hand, and strove to carry it to her lips, but he snatched it from her with a gesture of abhorrence, and she sank grovelling upon the floor.

'You hated Eady for *my* sake !' cried he ; 'then I hate *you* for *hers* !'

That ill-judged and miserable excuse of hers, had filled his cup of bitterness to overflow. His agony at seeing in the mother he had so loved and admired, a wretch guilty of one murder, and convicted of devising another, contended within him with a lonesome sense of desolation and despair. She was not only a criminal, but her crime was of a nature to separate

him for ever from the only being who could otherwise have given him comfort. He saw his betrothed (as indeed she was) distracted with the idea of losing him for ever, but still more overwhelmed with horror at that deed, the punishment of which would descend upon two innocent heads.

‘Oh, spare me, spare me, Spencer!’ moaned Gwendoline feebly, ‘if not for my sake, still for your father’s, who has no knowledge of these dreadful things.’

‘What is Lord Luttrell to me?’ answered Spencer sternly. ‘Father? What! one who has taken neither care nor thought for his child, and has taught him nothing but evil! No, I renounce him; I renounce *you*, woman! I solemnly swear, that henceforth I have neither father nor mother, nor rank nor position, nor country nor home! I will betake myself under a borrowed name to some far land, where my only wish will be, never to be recog-

nized for what I am—for what you have made me—and never to see England more. I renounce, I abjure you *all!*'

With a low moaning cry, that seemed the expiring wail of hope and life, Edith sank into Susan's arms.

'Not *you*, dearest,' cried Spencer passionately, and striding towards her—'not *you*, sweet Eady.' But the poor girl was quite insensible to his frantic appeals, and even felt not the shower of feverish kisses which he rained upon her cheek.—'Susan'—he whispered a few rapid words into the waiting-woman's ear, who answered mournfully: 'It shall be done, sir—as soon as she has strength.'

'Do you hear *that*, woman?' cried the young man in a terrible voice, and casting a glance of loathing at his still prostrate mother. 'That you have not killed her already, is not *your* fault;' and with that he rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN TOWN FOR THE LAST TIME.

It was fortunate on all accounts that Edith's first hysterical shrieks had not roused the household, but the heavy curtain before the door had dulled them, so that they had only reached the ears of those of whom we have spoken. The rest of the tenants of Glen Druid were still wrapped in repose, and knew nothing of the terrible scene which we have seen just enacted—nothing of the hasty steps of their young master descending the stairs which they were destined never more to tread, and passing the threshold they were

never more to cross. But Gwendoline listened to them with despairing anguish. She knew that he would never seek her face again ; that she was henceforth doomed to be an object of detestation to the only human creature, save one—and that one worse than dead—whom she had ever loved. For her husband, she had sacrificed herself body and soul, and he had repaid her with ingratitude ; for her son, she had been willing to sacrifice another, and for that she had justly earned his contempt and abhorrence. She still cowered abjectly upon the floor, watched with stern eyes by Susan Barland, in whose strong arms Edith yet reposed insensible, but not without some signs of returning consciousness.

‘Do you not think,’ said Susan with a significant glance at Eady’s closed face, ‘that you had better leave us, Lady Luttrell?’

Roused by these words from her wretch-

ed reflections, but still bewildered and dismayed, Gwendoline stared at her without reply.

‘Had you not better go, I say?’ repeated Susan fiercely; ‘or do you wish the sight of you to blast this innocent girl, and so to kill her that way?’

‘No, no,’ said Gwendoline humbly; ‘I will go.’

And she rose up slowly to her feet. It was pitiful to look upon her, notwithstanding all her wickedness. Her attitude was cringing and suppliant; the beauty of her smooth white face was marred by ignominious defeat; her once indomitable spirit broken; her soul swayed by abject fear. Even of her keen and scheming mind, nothing was left but the brute instinct of self-preservation.

‘You—you and *she*,’ cried she, pointing to her step-daughter with a trembling finger—‘what is it you mean to do with me?’

For an instant, looking at the haggard face, and those wild beseeching eyes, so different from what she had always known them, the thought that Lady Luttrell was gone mad occurred to Susan, and she clasped her unconscious charge more closely to her bosom. ‘*Do with you? What do you mean?*’ inquired she.

‘You will denounce me?’ answered Gwendoline hoarsely. ‘He—my own son—abjured me, and why not you and she? I say, do you mean to give me up?’

‘No, Lady Luttrell; no, for your son’s sake, we will not. But you must leave this place at once, and never see her more. That is the sole condition of my silence. Go!’

One twitch of mental agony drew back the lip that had so often curled in scorn, in fancied superiority over this very woman, as over so many other fellow-creatures, and then her face grew rigid once for all. Dismissed from her own roof by a menial, to

whose constrained mercy she was thus indebted for her very existence, beggared, disgraced, abhorred, it was indeed a moment bitter enough to leave its gall in life's cup for ever. It is said that like that king who lost *his* son in days of old, but not through his own crimes, Lady Luttrell was never seen to smile again.

Still—so unrelenting was her righteous doom—she kept her wits. That very morning, long ere my Lord was called, she had ordered a carriage out, and fled towards Town, partly in performance of her exacted promise, and partly, perhaps, with the instinct that compels guilty wretches to hide their heads in cities. There was reason enough to leave Glen Druid, at all events. So driving fast through wind and summer rain, she overtook, upon a barren moor, a young man walking swiftly and bareheaded. He kept his back towards her, but the first instant she caught sight of him she knew that it

was Spencer ; and her terror was, lest, as they passed by him, the coachman, recognizing his young master, should pull up, and her son should see her. But the man, who never dreamed that Mr Spencer had been taken with the same mad fit as her Ladyship to be up and out at daybreak, and half-blinded with the rain, took no notice of the wayfarer, and so the carriage whirled by, its cowering inmate sunk between the seats and below the level of the window.

Lord Luttrell, furious and alarmed at Gwendoline's sudden flight, set out at once in pursuit, and reached town in a few hours after her own arrival. He found her alone at night, in the great drawing-room, which was brilliantly lit up, and sitting with her chair close to the wall. 'What did this conduct mean?' was his imperious demand. 'Why had he thus been left at Glen Druid, by both wife and son, with that lackadaisical young girl,

too ill, it seemed, to see him, and not a soul to answer him a question? What, in the devil's name, did it all mean?'

Then Gwendoline, knowing that no subterfuge would then avail her, by which she could explain the future, even though it might palliate the present, made confession of her awful crime. 'It was twenty years ago, Luttrell,' appealed the wretched woman, 'when I was very young, and loathed my life, and I did it to be free, to marry *you*, whom I loved with all my soul.'

He shrank from her with stretched-out hands and shuddering face. The twenty years appeared to him but yesterday; she seemed a murderess with still unwashed hands. The mention of her love for him filled him with creeping terrors. He shivered at the remembrance of her caresses, like one who has felt serpents' slime; and when she moved towards him with a yearning pitiful face, and besought him not to cast her from him, since it was

for his sake that she had become what she was, he fled from her into the midnight streets.

‘O coward, and cruel!’ thought she, and not (had she argued it out) without reason. For it was men such as he and her father, who from her earliest years had been about her, false, selfish, and heartless, who had taught her, by precept and example, to be all for self; and she had but followed their teaching to the bitter end. A murder more or less would not have stained their souls much blacker, nor probably, to gain their ends, would they have hesitated to have committed such a crime, had opportunity offered it with safety. They had often worse than slain fellow-creatures of her own sex.

Nor indeed was Lord Luttrell’s sense of Gwendoline’s guilt so dainty, but that reflection caused him to think better of deserting her with her large stock of jewellery for certain, and perchance that

secret hoard of wealth at which we have heard him hint. He hated her, it was true, but then he had hated her before.

They lived together—as they were used to live—in name as man and wife, beneath the same roof, but passed one another on the stairs without speaking.

At last a letter came from Edith to Lady Luttrell, which compelled their common attention.

‘These are the last words you will ever read of mine,’ it ran. ‘I have given directions to Mr Mumm for Glen Druid to be sold with its contents, as well as my town-house, and all my effects that are in your keeping. I have also instructed him to pay you five thousand pounds—that is all you will ever have from me. I will never hear from you, nor, I trust, of you more.’

This letter had no address within it, but bore the Paris post-mark.

‘Is Spencer with her, think you?’ inquired Lord Luttrell gloomily.

‘Perhaps; I think I heard him tell Susan to bring her from Glen Druid; I cannot tell. I only know that I shall never see him more.’

‘There will be one less to keep,’ mused his Lordship. ‘Still we cannot exist in England upon this wretched pittance, even if I did not owe four times as much. We must live in France.’

‘Not France,’ sighed Gwendoline with a shudder, ‘for see, she writes from France. Wherever else you please.’

CHAPTER XIX.

AT CALYPSA FOR LIFE.

It is not in France, then, that Gwendoline and her husband dwell, but in a certain island off that coast where the French tongue is spoken (in the original), and where the people, if not French, are still less English. Let us call it Calypsa. The Calypsans are above all not English in this extraordinary particular—that the knowledge that a live lord and lady are dwelling in the midst of them, moves them not one whit. They are too used to the honour, too accustomed to receive such titled exiles, to be impressed by the cir-

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cumstance, and least of all, to be favourably impressed. When members of the British aristocracy deign to visit Calypsa, it is well understood that they do so for one of three reasons—Debt, Drink, or the Divorce Court. They have placed the sea between themselves and their creditors; or they are dipsomaniacs; or they are awaiting certain proceedings in that court of law which mitigates matrimony by releasing ladies of spirit from their vows, and enabling them (notwithstanding that they have made a mistake at starting) to marry whom they please after all. In the mean time, Calypsa is a favourite resort with—well, the injured parties. It is absolutely a *disadvantage* (if the British mind can grasp such a position) to wear a title at Calypsa. For what possible business, except a disreputable one—ask the sagacious inhabitants—can such a favoured individual have *there*? You must owe twenty thousand pounds at the very least;

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or you must be a confirmed brandy-drinker; or you must be in the semi-matrimonial or expectant position at which we have delicately hinted.

They took stock in their uninterested and philosophic fashion of Lord and Lady Luttrell, and decided that they were at all events not in the last category. They were not even a semi-attached couple. It is said that poverty acquaints us with strange partners of bed and board; but how much more abhorrent is it when it *reacquaints* us with those from whom we have parted with scorn and loathing, and compels us to be their mates again! Terrible reunions, that no spirit of forgiveness or conciliation cements, but which necessity alone imposes. In their great town-house in Mayfair, or at Glen Druid, the knowledge that the same roof covered them, had of late grown to both more or less irksome and intolerable, yet it had been possible to avoid meeting, to live

each their several lives independent of one another; but now their narrow means forbade such isolation. The gay favourite of society—the most popular young noble of his day—was doomed for ever to cleave to this woman, because he had no means of subsistence except what she afforded him; while Gwendoline on her part was quite aware how sordid was the link that alone bound him to her. Never since the time of guilty Essex and his countess, had there been such a wretched pair. Calypsa is very beautiful; the purple sea surrounds it; the soft southern breezes kiss it. It has woods and streams, and dells and uplands, on a miniature scale indeed, but very charming. The earth is fruitful, the sky is blue and cloudless. One silver-sanded bay succeeds another all round its cliff-girt coast, each more fair than its predecessor, each more fit for haunt of goddess, for dance of sea-nymphs. But Lord and Lady Luttrell did not care for scenery.

Nature was a dead-letter to them; and the artificial existence, which was the only one they knew, was in Calypsa but a very melancholy imitation of that to which they had been accustomed. A drive in a hired conveyance; a walk on the shabby little jetty, to hear the brass band of five performers; the interchange of small hospitalities, at which shrimps were not unknown; scandal, which, in the absence of higher game, concerned itself with altogether vulgar people—these were the occupations of the visitors in Calypsa, for the inhabitants for the most part kept aloof from them. Imagine, in short, all the wretched frivolities of Mayfair and Brighton enacted on a contracted scale, and, as it were, below-stairs. These things were almost as intolerable to the exiled pair, as man and wife were to one another; even the one genuine excitement of the place—the rushing down to the pier-head when the packet came in—was denied them; they

did not dare to do it, lest some folks just touching at Calypsa upon their way to other scenes, or designing to spend a day or two there from curiosity, should recognize them in their fallen fortunes. With respect to Gwendoline, this was always possible. Even though her health is somewhat broken by unrest, she still retains her marvellous beauty : one might almost think that Nature, like some seeming gracious fairy, had at her birth proffered her that eternal dower, in lieu of aught else that woman should covet. But there was no one at Calypsa whom it was worth her while to please with it.

Lord Luttrell, on the other hand, is 'dreadfully aged'—a conventional phrase, which, in his case, however, has a great significance. He is growing to be like Sir Guy Treherne before his time. His hair is grayer than his father-in-law's was ever seen to be, and his limbs are almost as shaky ; nor is Time only to blame for

this result—brandy is very cheap and good at Calypsa, and he indulges himself in that stimulant to excess. He has become dull, and even sottish, so that the pair rarely converse at all, or when they do it is upon some every-day affair that has no reference to their common past. But, upon one occasion, when my Lady, with her round dimpled arm in her white hand, was watching her apparently unconscious lord, as he sat and boozed, and wondering within herself how long he would last, and she be captive, he suddenly flamed up quite in the old way, and bade her try no tricks with him to shorten life. ‘If you kill *me*, you shall hang for it,’ said he rudely. ‘I have left a document with my good friend the magistrate here, which entreats him, in case of my death, to see whether I have died by poison, and, in that case, to arrest you, Madam Smoothface. I am not an old fool like Ferrier.’

It was curious that Gwendoline made

no reply, except that sharp twitch of the mouth which has replaced her smile for years. Perhaps, in that scheming brain of hers, some plan was really hatching for the dissolution of this second bond, that had become even more hateful than her first, even though it was no bar to fancied bliss; or perhaps she scorned to defend herself from such a charge. The idea once mooted, however, did not tend to smooth matters between the unhappy pair. He has never reproached her with it since; but in his cups he will sometimes look at her with a defiant air, and snap his taper fingers.

Such is Gwendoline's husband, such is her life, such is the Harvest she has reaped from the seed so carefully sown, so quickly ripened. She feels no remorse; she is too selfish to suffer from that cause; but the sense of disappointment—of her life's total failure—is bitter enough; and there is far worse than that within her. What has

become of the only being whom she ever loved, save herself, and still loves, and whom her own wickedness has alone estranged from her? Where is her only son, her darling Spencer? O for one look at him, to erase the abiding vision of that drooping figure, plodding so wearily across the misty English moor, as though bowed down by his mother's crime! *Where* is he? *How* is he? *What* is he doing? She shall never see; she shall never know.

CHAPTER XX.

AFAR.

OUR scene changes to a far distant spot from any to which this history has hitherto introduced us ; and yet not so distant as so different ; to a world which, although it belongs not to that called New, has nothing in common with the Old, and is therefore a most fitting home to those who would fain never be reminded of their English past—to Venezuela, where (in one of its three zones at least) the most exquisite beauties of nature are enjoyed without that penalty of ill health which she so often exacts for that privilege.

In that fair State is to be beheld, not only the world in little—for that can be seen wherever humanity dwells at all—but the three stages of man's development. There are the mighty forests where the wild hunter still supports his women-folk and children by his literal bow and spear; above them are the savannahs, where pastoral life is to be witnessed on a scale of vastness beside which that of the patriarchs of old becomes insignificant and paltry; and there are the high valleys above *them*, where Agriculture is cultivated along with her half-sister Civilization. Imagine a great *estancia*—a farm of immense extent—on one of those superb uplands, that seem to look down like the Mount of Temptation upon all the glory of the world. Every colour that diversifies the earth and makes it beautiful has its place there; not in mere streaks and patches, but in miles and masses of sublime splendour. We have heard of soil so rich that 'if we tickle

it with a hoe it straightway laughs in harvest,' but here that witty and beautiful image is even more than realized. Without man's aid at all, the whole expanse presents the richest as well as the most varied vegetation.

In the extreme distance lie the dark purple spheres of sea, with many a 'summer isle of Eden;' then the silver line of coast, with its vast plantations of sugarcanes, its shining woods—which are the glossy-leaved cacao—and its palm groves of prodigious height, with fruit in such clusters as only a strong man can lift.

On the next plateau are the virgin woods and the prairie, the illimitable green savannah. From the *hato*, or cattle-farm belonging to the estancia of which we speak (but thousands of feet beneath it), a horseman might start at full gallop early in the morning, and not reach the verge of his master's property until nightfall. He would travel over meadow-land smooth as

a garden lawn, amid troops of wild horses, and countless herds of wilder cattle, and by glittering ponds alive with all kinds of aquatic birds, and reflecting upon their clear surface the broad-leaved crowns of the fair palms towering above woods of laurel, while before, and behind, and around him stretches the great undulating plain, like a petrified sea of green.

But it is on the high valley that nature has outspread her most glittering store of fruit and flower, of verdure and blossom : there the products of the earth are tropical, while the climate is temperate and wholesome ; no stifling heat, no dangerous sun-darts, such as haunt the coast-line, are to be apprehended ; no fever spreads.

Bowered in green coolness, throned in mountainous calm, you look around upon a luxuriant blaze of vegetation. The orchard which surrounds our estancia is the handsomest imaginable, and indeed, by such as have only seen the orchards of

England, not to be imagined at all. The gleaming green of the cacao, with its cucumber-like pods, is contrasted with the crimson-flowered erythrina, such as at Glen Druid were seen a few feet high in boxes, but which here surmount the tallest trees, and glow above them like roofs of fire. In this orchard, which in size is almost a forest, and boasts of rocks and rivulets of its own, grow innumerable flowers, and especially those pretty parodies on nature and humanity—the air-plants; the gorgeous swanflower, with its clusters of rich blossom; and the vanilla, with a perfume whose sweetness makes faint the air. The richest productions of the tropics flourish side by side with the most esteemed fruits of our own temperate clime; the orange and the apple, the pomegranate and the peach, the guava and the grape-vine. Unsurpassed in beauty as in flavour grows the chirimoya, the fruit which has been likened to ‘lumps of

flavoured cream,' and of which it is well said that 'not to have tasted it is not to know what fruit is.' Among these beautiful objects flutter in the scented air swarms of tiny humming-birds, so small, and at the same time so brilliant in hue, that you almost take them for

Insects swift and free,
Like golden boats in a sunny sea—
Laden with light and odour that pass
Athwart the gleam of the living grass;

but even the poet would here fail to do them justice; they have not the mere metallic lustre of the insect, but flash with light and colour at once like winged gems. Type of the day-dreams that are here realized, the passion-flower bears not only blossom, but solid fruit, which leaves an exquisite taste behind it, and a desire for more. As though wearied with the exhibition of their own splendours, some of these flowers close both leaf and blossom to the kisses of evening; and again there are others which sleep in the sunbeams,

and make night glorious by their waking ; the pitahayer, for instance, which begins to open its huge flower as the sun declines, and scatters beneath the tropic moon the incense of its many-petalled cup.

With such surroundings, and where every weed gleams an odorous flower, it is not necessary that our estancia should possess a garden ; yet it does so, and in it grows many a home flower, to remind the mistress of the mansion, not indeed of England, but of one who (herself an involuntary exile from her native land) in England had such plants, and kept them about her. Beyond the garden and the orchard are woods of pink mimosa, of mango, and of cinnamon ; or the eye, wearied with splendour, may rest upon groves of pines and cypress, under whose grateful shade the mangolia and the tender violet grow. Beyond and above all, stand up with their heads in cloud the snowy shoulders of the Parima mountain-chain.

In such a spot as we have vainly endeavoured to paint with the faint hues of language, and in a dwelling suitable to the requirements of the climate, but of unusual size, and furnished with every luxury and convenience that wealth's far-reaching hand can supply, live Spencer Mostyn and Edith Ferrier his wife. We still so call him, but he has long carried out his threat of abjuring that name, and is now known by another. That which he has thus taken in exchange is already held dear in Venezuela. His courage and activity, manifested in many an expedition on the savannah in pursuit of the fierce wild-cattle, or in tracking the jaguar to its forest-home, first gained him the respect of his new compatriots; and his geniality and kindness have since won their love. His wife, too, as gentle as she is fair, is a favourite with all. The Venezuelans, whose notions of government are so crude, and whose rulers have so seldom been masters

even of themselves, have yet a very genuine love of their beautiful land; and that this rich young Englishman should have brought his bride to live among them, up in their native hills, was a circumstance grateful to them from the first. But they are now for ever boasting of that glorious and health-giving air of theirs, which has transformed 'the tress of the Day-star' (as, in their vague and flowery style, they are wont to term our Eady) from a fragile girl, trembling in life's balance, into a hale and active woman. Eady is not robust, but she can share the pleasures of a morning's ride along the sierra with her husband, and lives more out of doors than in.

As often happens where man and wife are exceptionally wealthy, Spencer and Edith are childless; but this is no drawback to the serene happiness which they enjoy; there are reasons, which we can guess at, why they do not wish for children. They are exceedingly devoted to one an-

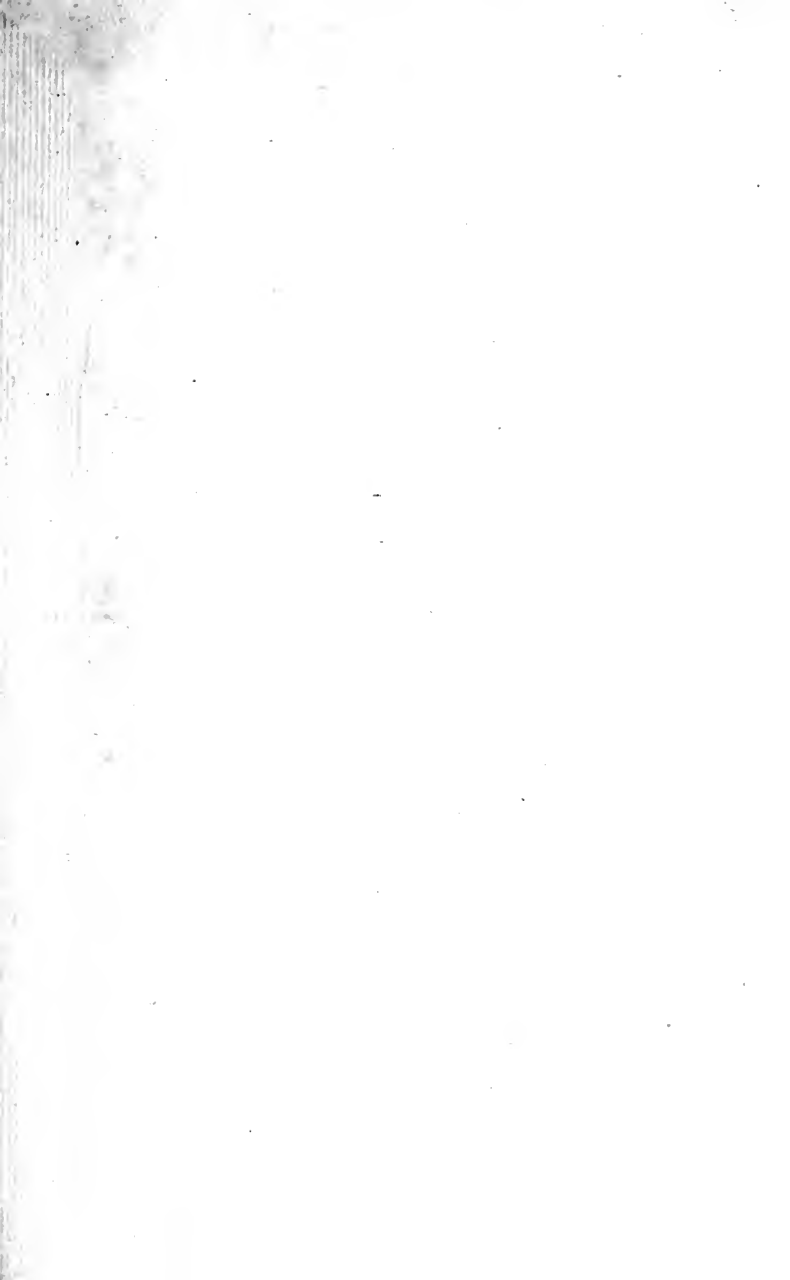
other, and are always cheerful, though, to the gay light-hearted folks about them, they seem (for such very young people) somewhat grave. Nothing is known of them beyond their visible wealth, and the fact, that they came out to Venezuela accompanied only by a confidential attendant (an old or old-looking woman, since dead), and that they never hold any communication with England.

THE END.

JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.







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